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PLAY

ISSUE 269



200 greatest moments in PlayStation history



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ISSUE 269



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The UK's only independent **PlayStation** magazine



END OF AN ERA



I'VE NEVER BEEN particularly good at breaking bad news to people, so I'll just come straight out with it – you hold in your hands the final print issue of **Play**. Yes, after 22 years and 269 issues, you'll no longer be able to see that familiar masthead when browsing your local supermarket or newsagent, but it's not all doom and gloom – we'll be continuing to spread the good word of PlayStation in a purely digital form, meaning anyone with a smartphone, tablet or computer (so pretty much everyone, then) will be able to follow along with us as we stride boldly into our (hopefully) bright new digital-only future.

Even though the mag itself will continue, I'm sure you'll agree that this marks the end of an era – **Play** has been around for almost as long as the PlayStation brand itself and many of the best and brightest in games journalism have been involved in its creation over the years. I've worked on my fair share of magazines myself, but none has had anything close to the kind of brand loyalty I see in the readers and ex-staffers of this fine mag. It's a sign that we love what we do, and that passion comes across and resonates with you, the lovely readers, creating a sense of community that money can't buy.

To commemorate this sad day, we decided to run down the pivotal moments in PlayStation history, all of which helped carry us to this very point. For those who have been with us since the start, it'll be a delightful stroll down memory lane. For those new to gaming, it should prove a fascinating history lesson (yes, we really did used to think that PSone games looked amazing). Either way, it's as fitting a send-off as we could put together without getting too sombre or self-indulgent. After all, this isn't really the end of the line – it's a new beginning in the now-digital adventures of Team **Play**.

Enjoy this final print issue and I'll see ya online...

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Celebrating 22 years of play

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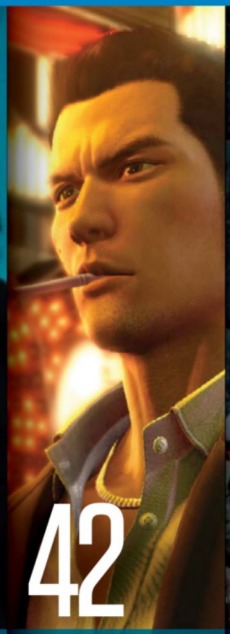




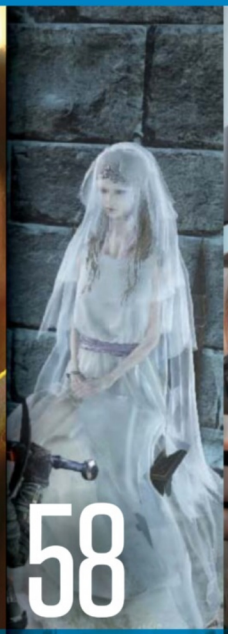
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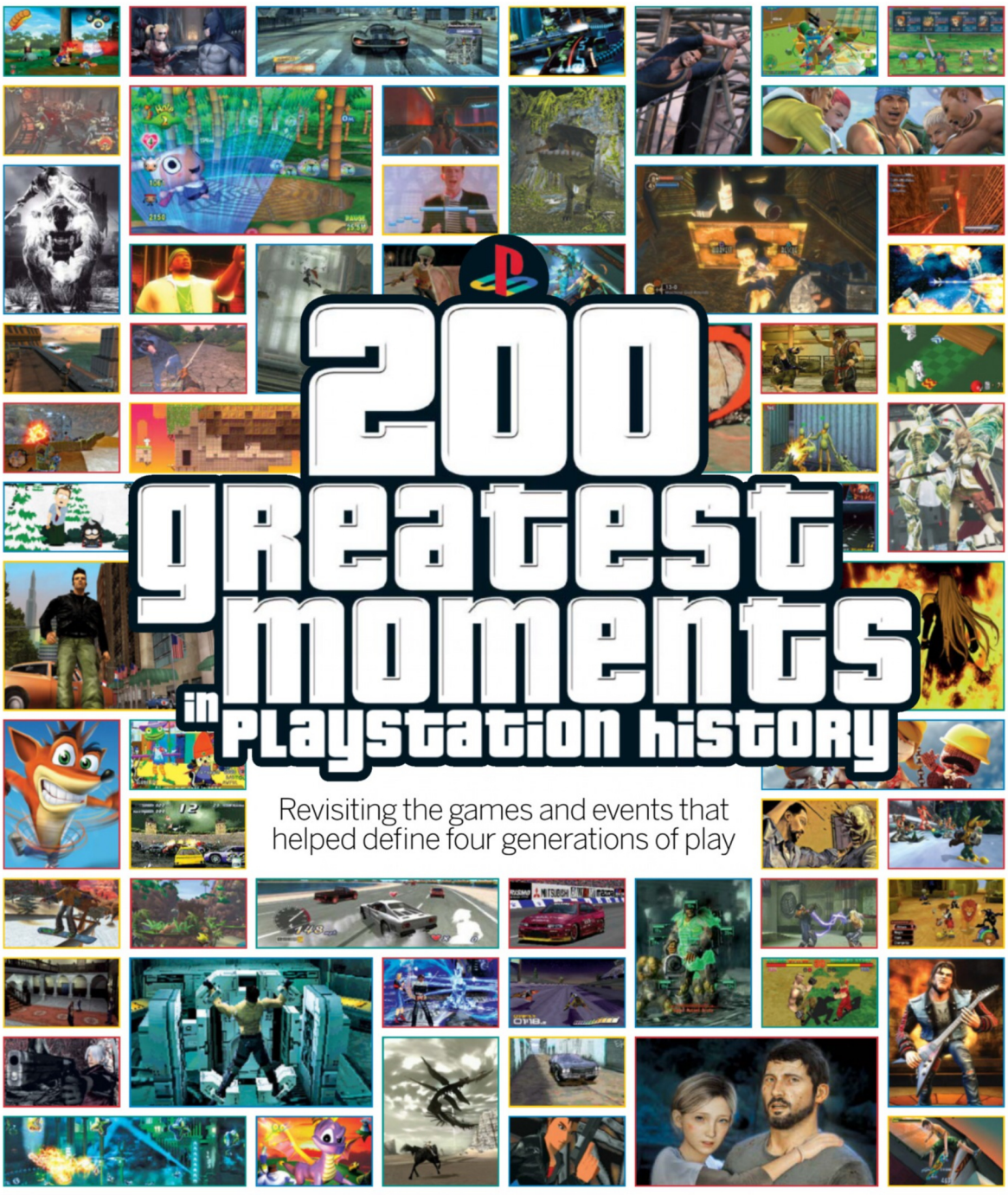
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SEE PAGE 54 FOR DETAILS ON HOW TO GET PLAY ON YOUR SMARTPHONE OR TABLET!



200 greatest moments in PlayStation history

Revisiting the games and events that helped define four generations of play

DAWN OF A NEW ERA

IF YOU WEREN'T there at the time, you don't know just how easy it would have been to write the PlayStation off as another also-ran. Up until 1993, Sega and Nintendo had ruled the console market, and while their 16-bit offerings (the Mega Drive and SNES respectively) were looking a bit long in the tooth, nobody had mounted a serious challenge to their dominance. Even the new 3D systems struggled. 3DO offered some impressive games, but at an eye-watering price. Atari's Jaguar was capable and cheap, but offered few worthwhile games. Any further newcomers would have to offer something special to stand out.

Sony had something special. *Jurassic Park* was the biggest thing on the planet – and in 1994, another Tyrannosaurus Rex was making waves in the entertainment business. That first PlayStation demo was a jaw-dropping statement of what Sony's new machine could do. As the dinosaur stomped around menacingly and roared at you, you got the feeling that even though Sony was better known for its TVs and stereos than its videogames, the PlayStation might just be able to take on the industry's giants. However, there was still plenty of room for doubt.

Unlike the other companies' machines, the PlayStation also faced a direct challenge from Sega, which was launching its Saturn console just days beforehand in Japan. Sega had something that Sony didn't, too – a massive internal staff that had become renowned for developing excellent games. Sony Imagesoft, throughout the 16-bit era, had been a fairly unremarkable publisher responsible for games like *3 Ninjas Kick Back*, *Skyblazer* and *Flink*, none of which you're likely to ever see on the cover of *Retro Gamer*.

On 3 December 1994, PlayStation launched in Japan. Most of the games were unremarkable, as anyone who remembers *Kileak The Blood* will tell you, but one exception proved the capabilities of the machine without a doubt. Namco's *Ridge Racer* was a stunning arcade conversion at a time when machines lived and died by their ability to replicate coin-op hits. Here was a game that was state of the art when it arrived in the arcades just a year prior, and Sony's machine showed off a conversion that played just as well and looked just as good.

Were the doubters gone? No. The Saturn was running neck and neck with the PlayStation thanks to *Virtua Fighter*. However, it was plain to see that the PlayStation was a truly next-generation machine in the way that the likes of the 3DO and Jaguar hadn't been, and there was cause for optimism. "Here's to a long and prosperous future," said an early adopter by the name of Dan Adelman in a post on Usenet – little did the future Nintendo staffer know quite how long and prosperous it would be.









THE WHOLE WORLD GETS TO PLAY

Following its successful launch in Japan the year before, we finally saw Sony enter the console market on a global scale. Advances in 3D tech had been considerable, with the shift to using CDs rather than cartridges allowing for more data to be stored. PlayStation captured the imagination of a generation, reinventing gaming by offering entirely new gameplay experiences, like *Jumping Flash*, alongside faithful ports of existing arcade favourites as well as the last wave of classic 2D games not ready to make the jump to 3D. Truly, it had something for everyone, making PlayStation the must-have piece of kit of 1995.



"PLAYSTATIONS WERE EVEN INSTALLED IN NIGHTCLUBS TO WOW MERRYMAKERS"

ROUND 482... FIGHT!

While not the first 3D fighter, *Tekken* became to Sony what *Virtua Fighter* was to Sega – a superb console-specific fighter that showcased a genuine evolution of the genre from its 2D origins. With the need to pour credits into the game removed, multiplayer showdowns could last *hours* and many of the moves and combos remain etched onto our brains to this day.



THE ARCADE COMES HOME

Arcades were once places you could go to see what exciting new games were made possible by cutting-edge 3D tech – something previously very primitive on consoles. In *Ridge Racer* (and indeed *Tekken*), PlayStation had a game that shattered that divide, delivering a true arcade-quality experience that you could play at home, at will. Why did the arcade scene die again?

GOTTA RECRUIT 'EM ALL!

RPG parties tend to be a small, close-knit bunch, so Konami's excellent *Suikoden* was mind-blowing by genre standards in that regard. Featuring a total of 108 recruitable heroes – the Stars Of Destiny – completionists were challenged to complete the roster and max out their small armies, with the reward for doing so making it even more satisfying.



GAMING GROWS UP

Videogames might have developed something of a reputation for being merely toys for geeks and kids, but that all changed here. With its clean, angular design and thumping electro soundtrack, *WipEout* led the charge in turning gaming into something *cool* – PlayStations were even installed in nightclubs to wow merrymakers with Sony's awesome new tech.



A LEGEND IS BORN

In 1972, a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. The team promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire... the **Play** team. These upstarts published the first issue of the fine publication you're holding, creating what would go on to be one of the longest-running videogame magazines in the world.



BIGGER, BETTER, MORE

Sequels to 1995's biggest releases were inevitable, and *Destruction Derby 2*, *Tekken 2* and *WipEout 2097* were all admirable follow-ups. Apart from each delivering the expected improvements to graphics and the requisite new content, each had a little twist. *Destruction Derby 2* featured vastly improved physics, Namco's 3D fighting game got new home-exclusive modes like Time Attack and Survival for the first time, and Psygnosis' futuristic racer broadened its appeal with a more forgiving difficulty level and better controls.



LET'S GET SMASHED

Singletrac's mixture of cars and carnage, *Twisted Metal*, was the unexpected hit of Sony's early PlayStation line-up, thanks to its excellent multiplayer mode and iconic vehicles such as Sweet Tooth (an ice cream truck driven by a clown) and Mr. Grimm (a hellish motorbike piloted by a skeleton). It also stands as the longest running PlayStation exclusive series!

THREE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

The key selling point of *Die Hard Trilogy* was that it offered three games in one, and they were all pretty good! Some people preferred the third-person shooting of the Nakatomi Plaza incident or the frantic driving required to defuse bombs in New York, but our favourite was the lightgun shooting action of *Die Hard 2*.



ADVENTURE EVOLVES

When Damian Butt previewed *Tomb Raider* in issue 10 of **Play**, he said, "If it isn't the best PlayStation game so far then I'm quite willing to park my new sports car underneath a canopy of weak bladdered seagulls." There wasn't a hint of hyperbole – *Tomb Raider* was like nothing we'd ever seen before, with enormous 3D caverns to explore and a character with all the acrobatic moves to do it in style. What's more, from bears to the infamous Tyrannosaurus Rex, you were never short of something big and fierce to slay. The series is still going strong today.

SONY TAKES POLE

The world had already taken part in its fair share of virtual F1 Grand Prix before Bizarre Creations produced an excellent game with the official licence. However, it was only on PlayStation that you could actually have Murray Walker delivering his inimitable commentary.



"WOW, WHAT A MANSION!"

Before this game, nobody used the term 'survival horror'. Think about that for a second. It's such an obvious description, but until *Resident Evil* it hadn't been coined – and that's the kind of impact *Resident Evil* had. Few games were designed to mess with you so effectively, whether you were scared by the awkwardly skewed camera angles, the distant moans of zombies, your limited supply of ink ribbons for saving the game or your even more precious stock of ammunition.



BACKING THE WRONG HORSE

Magazine covers are the trickiest of beasts and working with in-production titles means there's always room for error. Issue 11 was the first (but by no means last) time we would give cover space and a lot of coverage to a game that either, a) would never come out or b) could ultimately end up being a bit shit. *Terminator: Future Shock* falls into both camps, although at least we had the excellent *Die Hard Trilogy* on there too to make up for it. Even if it did sort of make it look like John McClane had melted and was actually a robot from the future...



ONE MASCOT, PLEASE

Sony couldn't have sold a hundred million PlayStations without getting the younger demographic on board, and *Crash Bandicoot* was the game to do the job, as it starred the kind of furry mascot every console needed in the Nineties. *Crash* didn't just have popular appeal, though – we described it as "the PlayStation's first *real* next-generation game" and it delivered on that promise with excellent cartoon visuals and impressive set-pieces. Oh, and you might have forgotten, but it was also quite a challenge – go back and see for yourself!



TAKING FULL CONTROL

Sony's original controller for the PlayStation was perfectly serviceable but as developers pushed further and further into three-dimensional space, it became clear that additional precision would be required. Enter the Dual Analog Controller, one-upping Nintendo's N64 pad with an additional stick and setting the template for pretty much every modern controller.

SONY GOES PLATINUM

In an effort to make gaming even more accessible, Sony introduced the Platinum range that made classic PlayStation games available at a permanently cheaper price point. Newcomers to the console could pick up all the essential games and this range continued to grow over the years, making it easy for anyone to assemble an awesome collection.

FOLLOW ME!

Pre-rendered backdrops were all the rage this year, with both *FFVII* and *Abe's Oddysee* using them to appear even more impressive than the hardware should otherwise allow. Here, the transitions between these – again pre-rendered – were incredible, but it was the strange hero who stole the show, with an ingenious in-game chat system allowing you to converse with and rescue fellow Mudokons and turn possessed enemies against one another.

THE POWER OF THE CLOUD

With six games released before Square realised that Europe wasn't a fictional place, *Final Fantasy VII* would be the first glimpse of the world-leading RPG franchise for many of us. And what a glimpse it was. Spanning three discs, Cloud's adventure was packed with shocking twists and turns that cemented it as a fan favourite – for many, it will never be topped.

ACTION!

Proving that more or less any arcade experience could be replicated on PlayStation, Namco created the G-Con – a lightgun controller that could turn any living room into a full coin-op experience. Championing precision, memory and reactions, *Time Crisis* was a great showcase for the peripheral, with later oddities like *Point Blank* helping to make it essential.



A MISERABLE LITTLE PILE OF SECRETS

Just because we were all being wowed by polygons and flashy new techniques didn't mean we would overlook games that were far more faithful to their heritage. Blending old-school *Castlevania* action with RPG mechanics and exploration a la *Metroid* (not to mention the beautiful sprites and great music), *Symphony Of The Night* is one of the all-time greats.



U RAPPIN' COOL

The six awesome stages of PaRappa The Rapper that helped define rhythm-action

KICK! PUNCH!
A anthropomorphic dog in a hat learns kung fu from an onion person in an attempt to impress a sunflower girl.

DRIVER'S TEST
In which our canine hero gets driving lessons from a particularly strict moose and passes his test despite forgetting to close the car door.

FLEA MARKET
After crashing his dad's car, PaRappa earns enough to replace it by helping a frog sell junk for about three minutes.

SEAFOOD CAKE
PaRappa makes a cake out of various bits of fish because a crazy chicken on a TV cookery show tells him to. Standard.

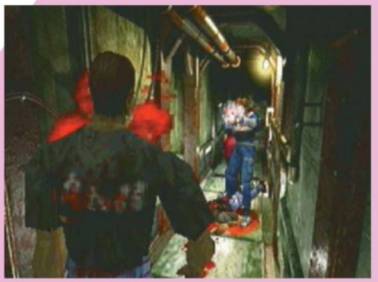
FULL TANK
All four previous characters return, and PaRappa must out-rap them in a toilet queue to avoid pissing himself.

PARAPPA'S LIVE RAP
A bug called MC King Kong Mushi invites PaRappa to live his dream and perform at Club Fun. I gotta believe!



RACING GETS REAL

Following the success of *Ridge Racer*, console racing games continued to be as they always had been – arcade-like experiences with exaggerated handling. *Gran Turismo* changed all that, delivering a realistic driving simulator for pretty much the first time on anything other than PC, with hundreds of officially licensed cars to buy, win, tune and upgrade as you burned rubber through loads of exciting events.



RACCOON CITY STORIES

Improving on the original in almost every way, *Resident Evil 2* is still considered by many to be the best traditional entry in the series. The two playable characters, Leon and Claire, each had two slightly different scenarios depending on the order you played them in, with improved visuals, better puzzles, more zombies and even worse dialogue (yes, that's a good thing) ensuring its legendary status.

CRUSHING THE COMPETITION

Many had scoffed at Sony's chances to topple the major players in the console market before PlayStation launched but by now, the Japanese tech giant had established itself as the dominant force on the scene. To such a degree, in fact, that Sega's Saturn, suffering from inferior third-party support and weaker hardware than the PlayStation, was discontinued this year. Sony had slain its first giant.



UNSTOPPABLE

Thanks to the likes of *PaRappa* and *Kurushi*, PlayStation had started develop a reputation as somewhere you could play original and bizarre games. That's sure as hell true of *No One Can Stop Mr. Domino!* – in which you must set out complex domino runs to trigger hazards when the relentless spotted hero is steered into them – and this remains one of the most endearingly bonkers things we've ever played.



INSOMNIAC STIRS

Middling FPS *Disruptor* might not have been the best introduction to Insomniac as a studio, but this would give us a better look at what the team that later made *Ratchet & Clank* could really do. Aiming for the same younger demographic as games like *Crash*, *Spyro* was a colourful adventure and the debut of what would go on to spawn what must be the highest-grossing spin-off of all time in *Skylanders*.

"PLAY'S BEST-SELLING ISSUE TO DATE AT THIS POINT WAS A GEX COVER"

STAR POWER

What's better than a generic shooter? Why, a generic shooter starring Bruce Willis, of course! It may not have been great but *Apocalypse* was the first time we saw celebrities star in games as they might movies and that's something which is bigger than ever today. So thanks to Activision, to Neversoft and to Bruce himself – we may never have gotten here without you.



GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES

This was the Year Of The Threequel, with a trio of PlayStation's leading franchises all hitting their stride with excellent third outings. Naughty Dog got more ambitious with what *Crash* could do; Namco further refined its *Tekken* franchise with an entry that pushed the PSone to its limits; Lara evolved yet again to deliver her biggest adventure yet. With support like this, Sony simply couldn't lose.



THANKS, MISTER LIZARD!

Given how long it's been running, it should come as no surprise that the fine folks writing this for you today aren't the same ones who staffed **Play** back in the day. As such, we're often treated to slices of history that surprise even us... like finding out that **Play**'s best-selling issue to date at this point was a *Gex* cover. Somehow, it shifted over 130,000 copies – to put that in perspective, that's better sales than every other UK games mag today *combined*.



SNAKE? SNAAAAAAKE!

Seldom has there been as big a leap between sequels as the jump from the MSX *Metal Gear* games and this, Snake's PlayStation debut. Cutscenes and story became as much of a focus as the stealth action, which itself improved exponentially with new options and mechanics making *MGS* the ultimate stealth playground. With an amazing cast of characters, some classic Kojima trickery (like having Psycho Mantis read your memory card and controller inputs), memorable boss battles and progression that bounced between action and cutscenes at a great pace, there's a good reason this is held aloft as a true PSone classic.

SPIELBERG GOES TO WAR

Medal Of Honor took Hollywood presentation to the next level. The story was penned by Steven Spielberg, gameplay modeled on *GoldenEye* and score composed by Michael Giacchino – an all-star crew, then, and this was reflected in one of the most impressive games of the era.

PARALLEL WORLDS

3D adventures were by now getting good at offering great worlds to explore, but Crystal Dynamics decided that one world wasn't enough with *Legacy Of Kain*. Here, Raziel is able to warp between the real world and the spectral realm, where the geography shifts about.

"...WHATEVER"

With its more realistic look and overhauled magic system (where you Draw spells for your stocks from enemies and Junction them to your stats to boost them), *FFVIII* is easily the most divisive of all the *Final Fantasy* games. It's definitely one of our favourites, though.

RADIO GA GA

Resident Evil's success proved that PlayStation owners enjoyed horror games, but *Silent Hill* would eschew the jump scares in favour of something in keeping with Japanese horror cinema – it had to be censored and amended before it would be granted a western release.



MONKEY BUSINESS

If we had to predict what would be the first game to require Sony's newly-launched DualShock controller, we can guarantee that our first answer wouldn't have been 'a game about chasing monkeys through time'. In this case, though, we'd have been happy to be wrong – *Ape Escape* was a unique experience on release, even if the later PSP port proved that it never really *needed* two analog sticks to work.



"SO HERE I AM, DOING EVERYTHING I CAN..."

It's literally impossible for us to hear Goldfinger's *Superman* without going a bit misty-eyed as we recall the glory days of the *Tony Hawk* series. The original came out of nowhere, with an unknown developer turning in an compelling score attack game. Significant improvements in sequels make it tough to go back to today but at the time, this was something genuinely new and we couldn't stop playing.



THE IMPOSSIBLE TUTORIAL

As huge fans of the *Souls* games, we're not averse to challenging experiences. But when the hardest level in a game is the *tutorial*, as in *Driver*, you have to figure something is amiss. If you could check off the list of techniques you were asked to pull off in the car park, you were treated to some superb chases, stakeouts and other vehicular missions. Problem was, most people couldn't even make it that far.



THE THIRD PLACE

The time had come to take things to the next level, and Sony was ready. Leading the charge into the next generation, PlayStation 2 exploded onto the scene in late 2000 and became the year's most desirable tech product. Demand greatly outweighed supply and with Sony handling its own pre-order scheme, it was near impossible to pick up a console at retail until some time after launch – initial shipments pre-sold out, leaving those who didn't get their orders in early to twiddle their thumbs and waiting for the next batch.

Said batches did come, but they were as infrequent as they were in demand, thanks to a number of ingenious moves from a technical perspective. Gamers were always going to want that the next PlayStation, but Sony had bigger game in its sights – the mass market. You can see this to a greater degree later in the console's life, with titles like *EyeToy Play* and *SingStar*, but even at launch, there were some crazy-good bullet points on the list. Releasing just as DVD began to take over from VHS as the movie-watching standard, PS2 made for a competitively priced DVD player, falling in line with the cost of an entry-level player (and even outperforming many, it must be said) while also offering gaming functionality on top of video playback. For many, that was the clincher – why buy a bespoke player when you could have a solution that also plays games?

It worked so well that other companies continue to bang the same 'all-in-one entertainment system' drum to this day, but nothing will ever beat the PS2's contribution to this cause. Except PS4, because it already has – as impressive as PS2's sell-through was at the time, it has been beaten for the first time fairly recently. By another Sony console. You might have heard of it...



BAD ART IS BAD

There's little we in the magazine production business fear more than terrible cover art. You can score a huge exclusive on the biggest game on the planet but if a last-minute asset drop screws you over, there's not a lot you can really do about it. These days, renders and concept art tend to be pretty damn good but back then, that certainly wasn't the case – this uncanny recreation of *Die Hard* star Bruce Willis is a perfect example. Still, it made the next few covers look incredible by comparison.

PS2 LAUNCH HIGHLIGHTS

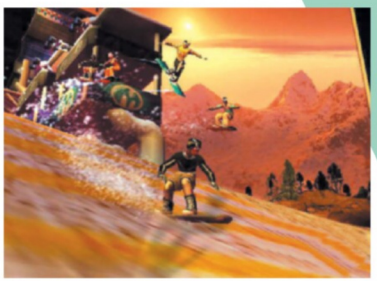


TIMESPLITTERS

A colourful FPS from a bunch of ex-*GoldenEye* staff. Cracking multiplayer but extremely light on solo content.

TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT

Namco once again provides the go-to fighter for a PlayStation launch, although Tecmo's ace *Dead Or Alive 2* port was no slouch either.



SSX

Did for snowboarding what the *Tony Hawk* games did for skating, if with more focus on racing than tricks to begin with.

FANTAVISION

Many players balked at the idea of buying a new console only to play a firework-based puzzle game, but they were wrong to – this was great.

PSONE AIN'T DEAD YET

Five later games that kept the platform alive, even after being superseded

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

Flatland tricks were a real game-changer, allowing for crazier combos than ever before.

VAGRANT STORY

A stylish JRPG, this is considered by many to be one of the best examples of the genre.

SPIDER-MAN

Licensed games were all awful, right? Wrong. Neversoft absolutely nailed ol' webhead here.

TOMB RAIDER: CHRONICLES

The fifth Lara adventure in as many years, although the magic still hadn't faded just yet.

CHRONO CROSS

A follow-up to SNES classic *Chrono Trigger*, this stunning RPG sadly never made it to Europe.

RPGS LEVEL UP

2001 introduced the *Diablo*-esque *Dark Alliance* onto PS2 systems after fans basically lobbied Snowblind to make it with a sustained campaign. The town management-cum-action-RPG *Dark Cloud* also took everyone by surprise with its simple, enjoyable systems and impressive graphics, all paving the way for the great RPG successes the PS2 would enjoy.



REFILLING THE SUNDAY CUP

Having made a name for itself on PSone as the leading console racing sim, *Gran Turismo 3*'s arrival on PS2 was an early highlight for the system, even though it turned up a little later than planned. The car count was reduced significantly from *GT2* (24 Skylines was probably overkill anyway...) to fuel the vastly improved visuals, and it remains the second-best-selling game in PlayStation history, shifting almost 15 million units.

DANTE'S AWAKENING

Considering that the *Devil May Cry* series started its life as an early prototype of *Resident Evil 4*, even the developers at Capcom were surprised when it ended up defining the 'character action' genre. With its cocky post-Nineties attitude and stylish yet difficult-to-master combat, *Devil May Cry* became a classic practically overnight.



ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE GAME

Just as *THPS2* had soared over the original game with a sick sequel the year before, EA threw money at this high-profile *SSX* follow-up. With refined mechanics and trick systems joined by added star power thanks to the likes of Run DMC, Lucy Liu, Mix Master Mike and Macy Gray, this joined *Tony Hawk*'s on the extreme sports podium and proved very hard to budge.

NAUGHTY DOG'S NEW TRICKS

A new console generation needed a new platforming icon – *Crash Bandicoot* was off elsewhere racing around in nitro-powered karts, and Naughty Dog was keen to expand upon that lush, exotic art style it played with in *Warped* and *Crash Bash*. Enter the elf-like Jak and his mouthy (quite Crash-like) companion Daxter, and a game that was basically everything Crash did right, but all a bit more... mature: Naughty Dog had hit puberty.

MUCH HORROR

Nobody could have predicted this ending to the otherwise unsettling and grim *Silent Hill 2*: watching a Shiba Inu, which had apparently masterminded the whole game, lick James' face as the tortured protagonist falls to his knees in exasperation totally undermines the tone of *Silent Hill*, and will forever stick in our memories as one of gaming's most 'WTF' moments.



FREE GAME WITH YOUR DEMO

How do you get a long-shot arcade/anime mech shooter new IP to sell outside of Japan? Easy – chuck in an early demo of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, of course. The tanker demo turned out to be one of the best bits of the game, while, ironically, it was *Zone Of The Enders* that felt more like a demo, although the team smashed it with surprise sequel, *The 2nd Runner*.



A WHOLE NEW WORLD

What we now take for granted in *GTA* was all introduced here with its third instalment: the unique open world, the mission structure, the radio stations brimming with lampooned personality, the Easter eggs, the humour... this was a benchmark by which 3D games for adults would be measured, and it did it all against a backdrop of the early Noughties: a commentary on the age it was released into. No wonder this and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* are tied as the highest rated PS2 games of all time on Metacritic.

TEAM PICKS



GAVIN MACKENZIE
FORMER GAMES EDITOR

My most enduring memory of **Play** dates back to long before my time on the mag. I was working for a different publisher at the time. Someone brought **Play** into the office. It had an exclusive review of a game that those of us in the know had high hopes for. This copy of **Play** is being passed around and everyone is salivating over the review. It's making claims for the game that make it sound too good to be true. I mean, ridiculous overstatements and hyperbole. But you know what? We all believed every single word. We all trusted **Play**. **Play** didn't cough up a score of 98% easily. And every word that **Play** said about *Grand Theft Auto III* was true.



WHEN PLATFORMERS FELL DOWN

Two wonderful and colourful games – one thoughtful and arthouse, the other zany and action-led – the duo of *Ico* and *Ratchet & Clank* heralded the twilight of the action-platformer. The PS2 would still have some great genre titles left to come, but RPGs and FPS games were selling better now. Luckily, the likes of Team Ico, Insomniac and Naughty Dog would make sure the genre faded with grace and charm (until *Knack* came along to ruin it all).



THE WORLD IS YOURS

GTAIII was a critical and commercial success, but it was far from perfect: graphical bugs, camera issues and a few handling inconsistencies saw to that. Enter *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*: a cocaine-fuelled Eighties flashback painted in neon strips and Malibu sunsets. It addressed the scant issues with *GTAIII* whilst introducing what Rockstar would go on to master in due course: some of the best character development in the business.



WHEN SQUARE TOOK THE MICKEY

All the bombast of Disney mixing with the stat management of a JRPG, laced with the dressings of the *Final Fantasy* series? No one predicted it, and the fact it was pitched by Square's Shinji Hashimoto to a Disney rep in an elevator just suits how off-the-wall this whole series is.

BUT IS IT ART?

Rez has been featured in the Smithsonian museum of American Art. You basically make music as you blow things up: it's the closest gaming can get to synaesthesia, and it's hypnotic. Area 5 in particular will go down as one of the greatest levels of all time.

"METAL GEAR SOLID 2 MADE THE FIRST GAME'S CINEMATICS LOOK LIKE SATURDAY MORNING CARTOONS"



SQUARE'S LEAP OF FAYTH

Final Fantasy X was Kitase's masterpiece: an immersive, emotive world with an eclectic cast of well-developed characters, and sporting full voice acting and 3D environments for the first time in the series. Supported by intelligent RPG systems, a reworked battle system and one of Uematsu's best scores, *FFX* redesigned the JRPG for the new technology, selling over a million copies in its first few months.



A GAME TO SURPASS METAL GEAR?!

A divisive and controversial beast, *Metal Gear Solid 2* made the first game's cinematics look like Saturday morning cartoons: sprawling cutscenes got to show off Kojima and his team's superb graphics engine, but at the cost of a comprehensible plot. Some amazingly bizarre scenes (naked Raiden et al) followed, cementing Kojima's reputation as the mad genius of the videogames industry.



PS2'S GOLDENEYE MOMENT

TimeSplitters 2 was the best split-screen game you could play on the PlayStation 2, and a lot of younger gamers, some of us included, were introduced to the concept of FPS deathmatches here. You could argue without *TimeSplitters 2*, the current gamut of online FPS games wouldn't have the audience it does. We estimate *thousands* of merry evenings were spent with this disc in the tray.



TRANSCENDING HISTORY AND THE WORLD

Multi-platform was the norm for big releases, though Namco found an interesting twist on just chucking a game out on anything that would run it. *SoulCalibur II* featured a unique guest character for each format – we got Heihachi (even though *he doesn't have a weapon*), GameCube got Link and Xbox got... um... Todd McFarlane's Spawn. Yeah...

"SONY DID AWAY WITH THE NEED FOR A CONTROLLER ALTOGETHER WITH THE ENTERTAINING EYETOY PLAY"

ON THE SAME PEYJ

Ubisoft wasn't always a sequel factory, you know – cult favourite *Beyond Good And Evil* offered a curious blend of exploration, adventure, platforming, photography and action, the likes of which hadn't really been seen before, or indeed since. A sequel was apparently in the works, with recent rumours suggesting it could be exhumed for Wii U's successor.

BE KIND, REWIND

Given that creating a traditional *Prince Of Persia* game in 3D had already failed once, nobody really expected *The Sands Of Time* to be any good. But that only made it all the sweeter when it turned out to be one of the smartest adventures since the original *Tomb Raider*, featuring the ability to manipulate time to gloss over mistakes and keep the action flowing.



BEST. TUTORIAL. EVER.

What's so special about an evolved version of a great fighter, you ask? Try reading next time – the clues are right there. *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* features an in-depth training suite so packed with options and advice that it puts literally every other dojo that has come along since to shame. If you want to learn 3D fighters, this is still the best place to start.

HARMONIX HANDS

Given the intensity of *Amplitude*'s note charts on higher difficulties and the fact that its three-button setup pretty much forced you to use the triggers, extended sessions with this rhythm-action masterpiece would often lead to a condition known to many (some... okay, us) as Harmonix Hands. It was worth the pain, though – there are few better traditional music games.

NO NEED FOR FREE SNAKE THIS TIME...

While the original game might just have served as a vessel for delivery of the *MGS2* demo, the second *Zone Of The Enders* was actually a really awesome mech shooter as opposed to just an interesting tech demo. It looked so good that the HD remaster on PS3 managed to look like a native game for the console without that much tweaking... pretty impressive.

BUTTONS ARE FOR LOSERS

In a move to make gaming even more accessible, Sony did away with the need for a controller altogether with the entertaining *EyeToy Play*, a mini-game collection where you yourself become the controller by dancing around in front of the USB camera like a tit. It caught on surprisingly well considering how insubstantial it all was.





BIGGER IS BETTER

Sure, size isn't everything. But when you're dealing with a game like *GTA* where scale and detail account for so much, *San Andreas*' giant map means a lot. It wasn't even like it was empty, either – areas between the three main cities were fairly barren, yeah, but if you've ever been out that way, it's actually fairly accurate.



SEAN PAUL, MEET TRAIN

As much as *Def Jam: Fight For New York* was set up to be a power trip for its stars, it also allowed a lot of violent acts which should have been legalised at the time. Chief among these was throwing gobbledegook factory Sean Paul under a train as a finisher in a heated bout – to this day, we feel more sorry for the passengers.

PLAYING THE MOVIES

One of the main pitfalls *Star Wars* games have fallen foul of over the years is the idea that they need to develop new stories and characters in these established worlds. Screw that – give us the chance to play out classic scenes from the movies and we're in, and that's just what *Battlefront* did perfectly.

MIND THE PAINTWORK

After so many years of working on perfect racing lines and avoiding other cars, *Burnout 3: Takedown*'s primary conceit – that other racers could be screwed over with a well-timed shunt – made getting good at it a relearning process, but an immensely satisfying one. Road Rage events in particular had us hooked for months.



GET IN THE SEA

Turns out we can't be trusted with telekinetic powers. Midway's sleeper hit *Psi-Ops* allowed us to not only fling bullets at our enemies but warp their tiny minds, setting up possibilities that ranged from forcing enemies to commit suicide to just flinging them miles into the air WITH MIND BULLETS. That's telekinesis, Kyle.



RICKROLLED IRL

"Hey, you're up! I picked that one you like!" Gleefully, we grab the mic, ready to give the roof cause for concern. But to our dismay, we're stuck singing *Never Gonna Give You Up*. Again. *Singstar* proved to be both a popular casual pursuit and a troll-enabling party game, and we don't hate either facet.



KICKING IT, OLD-SCHOOL

Much like 2D games in general had a bad time in the PSone era, classic genres had trouble making friends when the power of PS2 opened even more doors for gameplay possibilities. That said, the likes of *Gradius V* and *R-Type Final* showed there was still room for experimentation and finesse in even the most well-trodden fields.



GAMING SHOWS ITS SERIOUS FACE

Even violent releases like *GTA* had long had a tendency to play it for laughs on console, but *Killzone* was one of the first games to handle matters like war with a straight face and little Hollywood pizazz. That Helghast mask looked pretty darn swish on the cover, too...

GOOOOOOOOOD!

Taken at face value, *Ribbit King* is awful. It makes little sense on a gameplay level. But the sooner you realise that's sort of the point, the sooner you start enjoying it. As a multiplayer game, this golf-but-with-frogs oddity remains peerless in its ability to entertain, resulting in a devout but niche following that exists to this day.

★★★★☆ **gt3 is great!**

By A customer on June 16, 2004

Format: Video Game

gt3 is great but there is minimus choose out cars.
the tracks are great.
gt3 is so long here,
when does gt4 comes.
first december then juli
come on
when does gt4 comes?

THE GREATEST USER REVIEW OF ALL TIME

We should probably have stopped the internet after this literary masterpiece was posted on Amazon (for a game that wasn't even out yet, we hasten to add) as it is unlikely to ever be bettered. Come on... when does *GT4* comes?



ATHEENAAAA!

While mascot culture had long since died out, PS2 had been calling out for a good face to steal as its own. Many would-be poster children tried – Jak, Ratchet and countless others – but it just wasn't working. So it turns out all we needed was a demi-god sociopath that would murder any who wronged him in the most graphic manner possible. Videogames! *God Of War* injected some much-needed controversy into the PS2 and we enjoyed every second of it.



CRAB BATTLE

What's the response to all the complaints that *MGS2* didn't have enough Snake in it? Well, make the Snakiest game ever and you'll probably find out, just like Konami did with *Metal Gear Solid 3*. Here, on-site procurement extends even to food – you need to eat wildlife to sustain yourself – but for many of us, it was just good to see *MGS* back to being celebrated for its gameplay.

THIS PARTY'S GETTING CRAZY

So the first *Devil May Cry* was great, but the second was a car crash. How do we know Capcom didn't just get lucky that one time? Well, from the intro of *DMC3* alone, it's clear that tongues have no intention of leaving cheeks, and that the tools we have to play with are significantly broader and more satisfying.

E3 GOES ALL KINDS OF WRONG

All eyes were on Sony to deliver when it came to the PS3 reveal, and we didn't even get a 'sorry we missed you' card. Ludicrous pricing, appalling use of stage time and a generation's worth of built-up bravado made for one of the most embarrassing meme factories in E3 history – 'Giant Enemy Crab', 'RIIIDGE RACER', '599 US Dollars'... it all started here. Sigh. Still, at least Sony seems to have learned from these embarrassing mistakes...

NOT JUST FOR SQUARES

If you were embroiled in the console war bullshit going on at the time, you'll know how big a deal the Capcom Five was to GameCube owners. Well, one of those games never came out, one was rubbish and the other three – including the superb *Resident Evil 4* – came to PS2 as well. While more action-heavy than classic *Resi* (like later games), few could deny this game's class.

HUNTING SEASON IS OPEN

Big game was the order of the day and whether that be through the gargantuan bosses of *Shadow Of The Colossus* or the loot-grind ways of Capcom's wonderful *Monster Hunter* series, we all wanted to fell gigantic foes. Some of us still do, although one of these options wouldn't stay Sony-exclusive for long...



WHAT WERE WE THINKING?

Concept articles are tricky. They work perfectly or they backfire, and we can't decide to this day which side this example falls. So caught up in the way of the Crazy Frog were we that we decided to print this, maybe the most meta preview ever. Brrrrring-a-ding a-ding...

100 MILLION!?

Although Sony's success with PlayStation was well documented, many expected it to be a flash-in-the-pan affair before Sega and Nintendo came back to claim the throne. No dice. Sega had checked out of the hardware market after the Dreamcast was steamrollered by PS2's first few years, while even the new Nintendo console – with its bespoke tiny discs and lack of support – buckled. PS2 broke 100 million units this year without Sony even breaking a sweat.

A PORTABLE PLAYSTATION

Given Nintendo's success in the handheld market, Sony's late RSVP came as something as a surprise to many. It made sense, though – PSP had brute force on its side and the portable was peerless in terms of what a piece of hardware that small could deliver.



gameshop.co.uk



ROLL, ROLL, ROLL YOUR BALL

Given that we never got the original *Katamri Damacy* in Europe, *We Love Katamari* served as our introduction of the King Of All Cosmos and his junk-collecting son. There are plenty of crazy new objectives to complete that range from rolling up a snowman's head to dazzlingly fast time attack stages, and it's all bonkers.

BULLY FOR ROCKSTAR

Originally known as *Bully*, Rockstar's school-based twist on *GTA*, *Canis Canem Edit*, whipped up all sorts of controversy, though it was much tamer than was suggested. It later appeared on Xbox 360, Wii and PS4 with its original name, the earlier controversy forgotten about.



AN ARCADE LEGEND RETURNS

Sega thought it was impossible for *Out Run 2* to run on PS2, but boy did Sumo prove it wrong. *Out Run 2006* not only featured the courses from *Out Run 2* and *SP*, but also added the gigantic Coast 2 Coast mode. And somehow Sumo crammed it all into the PSP as well!

SNAKE PLAYS HIS CARDS RIGHT

The Solid Eye device may have been a device for perverts, but everything else about *Metal Gear Acid 2* was inspired. It fixed all the annoying issues found in the first game, leaving a stylish game as good as its plot with a refined version of the original's novel deck-building systems.



THE HAPPIEST GAME OF ALL TIME

Although the PSP had plenty of cut-down PS2 games, it also had charming gems like this. *LocoRoco* is a delightful platformer where you collect berries to grow in size and split up into smaller LocoRocos to navigate the cleverly designed levels. It features amazing music too – the little dudes sing along and everything.

THE PERFECT CRIME

For many, *Blood Money* is the best *Hitman* game. Its levels are fantastic and allow for all sorts of devious planning, it boasts plenty of new mechanics, including upgraded weapons and human shields, and it generated a lot of attention thanks to a controversial ad campaign.



THE QUEST REACHES EUROPE AT LAST

Dragon Quest was already well-regarded in Japan, but this was the first game in the series to bear the name here. *DQVIII* features sensational cel-shaded visuals, plenty of interesting characters and pleasingly deep combat mechanics. In short, it's brilliant.

THE BEST PORTABLE FIGHTER EVER?

Dark Resurrection is truly astonishing. It's blisteringly fast, running at 60fps, allows you to fight other players' ghosts in Tekken Dojo and had three new character to master. Sadly, the D-pad attachment Namco created for easier play wasn't included with the European version.



ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR

Rhythm-action games changed forever in 2006. Harmonix's two *Guitar Hero* games not only featured the same intricately-designed fusion of music and button mastery that had made its earlier games so hypnotic to play, but the developer also found a way to make you feel like an actual rock god – by adding a plastic guitar peripheral into the mix. It worked brilliantly. So brilliantly, in fact, that it created a whole new sub-genre that led to Activision milking the franchise into the ground, leaving Harmonix to reshape the landscape again with *Rock Band*, the quintessential multiplayer music game.



GETTING AHEAD OF OURSELVES

Nobody can say that we weren't ready for PS3 to arrive – our first issue of the year featured the shiny new super console on the cover, as well as having a redesign inside to prepare for a new generation. Annoyingly, Japan and America both got the console this year, but Europe had to wait another year. Boo!


REVIEW

Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

PS3

UPGRADING TO XP

In addition to being the only *COD* game in recent memory where the campaign can be described without yawning, *Modern Warfare* is almost entirely responsible for the current shape of the competitive FPS scene on consoles.

A COLOSSAL SEQUEL

The angriest man in gaming returned with a greater thirst for blood than ever in *GOWII*. Even from the Colossus boss battle that opens the game, it was clear that this was going to be bigger and more brutal than Kratos' debut.

PSN'S RAISON D'ETRE

While PSN as a free online play service was great in theory, it took a while for the killer apps to arrive. As such, *Warhawk* offered a fantastic glimpse of the shape of things to come – large-scale battles and a tight core combat loop.

SICK FLICKS

As *Tony Hawk* descended further into franchise fatigue and straw-clutching, EA decided to take skating back to its roots with *Skate*. EA's new franchise, with its unique stick-based controls, quickly became the new go-to game for fans.



PS3 FINALLY ARRIVES!

Better late than never, right? Yeah§... about that. PS3 arrived with a bit of a whimper rather than the bang fans were hoping for, with the weakest lineup of any PlayStation launch, an eye-watering price point and a bevy of technical niggles. While the console clearly had the edge over the 360 in terms of raw power, the weak launch allowed Microsoft to pull ahead and even the launch window games showed a console playing catch-up – games like *BioShock*, *Sonic*'s awful reboot and the stunning *Oblivion* all showed up fashionably late and it would be some time before Sony could put the true potential of its latest piece of kit to good use.



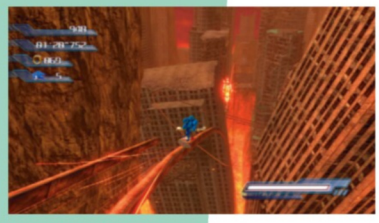
IT'S SO BIG!

Stepping out from the starting dungeon into the gigantic overworld of *Oblivion* is a gaming memory that will never leave us – never before had we felt so utterly overwhelmed by the possibilities laid out for us in a videogame. While games like *Fallout 3* and *The Witcher 3* have since pulled very similar stunts, it hasn't had quite the same impact as that very first time.



THE WOLF AMONG US

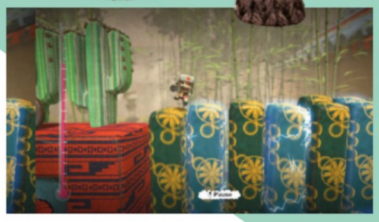
One of the most artistically beautiful games ever made, *Okami* adapts and refines the action-adventure template laid out by *Ocarina Of Time* as the wolf goddess seeks to restore life and colour to a dying world. If you never played this wonderful game, the HD version on PS3 is the way to go – Capcom's upscaling work here was superb, making it utterly timeless.



NOT LIKE THIS...

In addition to introducing Silver The Hedgehog, another character in the franchise that literally no one wanted, the reboot of *Sonic* also features glitches, awful loading times and dallies with mild bestiality. It's a complete mess of a game that even Sonic fans rarely defend, but it does at least make *every other game ever made* look a lot better by comparison.





SACK TO THE FUTURE

Few games generated quite the same level of buzz as *LittleBigPlanet* when it was first demoed at GDC in 2007, but there was a degree of scepticism too given the game's lofty ambitions and innovative approach to player-generated content. By the time it hit shelves the following year, however, it became clear that Media Molecule had created something special. Whimsical in its visual design, simple and refined in its gameplay and leading the UGC charge long before *Minecraft* rose to prominence, *LittleBigPlanet*'s legacy as a revolutionary piece of gaming history is secure.



WELCOME TO RAPTURE

No gods or kings. Only Man. It was here that players first set foot in the underwater dystopia of Rapture and one of the most iconic videogame settings of all time was born. Even after some solid sequels, the ingenuity and atmosphere of the original *BioShock* still sends shivers down our collective spine.

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Sadly, support for PSP saw a sharp decline from here. Games like the rhythm-strategy *Patapon* and the action extravaganzas *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* and *Crisis Core* were treats, but they couldn't hide the fact that this marked the beginning of the end, even though the superb *Peace Walker* was still to come.

TROPHIES UNLOCKED

It seems almost impossible to think that the PS3 launched without the Trophy system in place, but it took Sony almost a full year to implement a system to rival the Xbox 360's Achievements. Better late than never, though – the crucial patch arrived in 2008 and we've never been quite the same since.

"FEW GAMES GENERATED QUITE THE SAME LEVEL OF BUZZ AS LITTLEBIGPLANET WHEN IT WAS FIRST DEMOED AT GDC IN 2007"



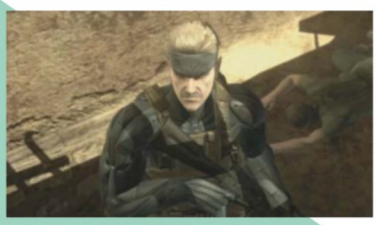
A NEXT-GEN CRIME WAVE

It may have since been upstaged by its bigger, flashier (and colourful) sequel, but *Grand Theft Auto IV* remains an astounding achievement. The series' transition to HD brought with it a whole new level of realism, and an incredibly updated Liberty City teeming with inhabitants and distractions. Oh, and it had *that* bank robbery mission.



ARCADE RACERS ABOUND

PlayStation racing fans had the pick of several fine games in 2008, despite the ongoing wait for a PS3 *Gran Turismo* title. *Race Driver: Grid* and *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift* both provided their own unique brand of arcade thrills, while *Burnout Paradise* took Criterion's tried and tested blazing-fast racer formula and moved it into an open world. If we were to pick one, we'd say *Burnout* was the best of the bunch.



BACK TO SHADOW MOSES

The culmination of years of fevered development, Hideo Kojima's conclusion of the Solid Snake story took the idea of a cinematic videogame and ran with it, for about a billion hours. Between its many extended cutscenes, though, *MGS4* delivered some of the most accomplished stealth-action gameplay yet seen, and fans lapped it up.



THE WASTELAND RETURNS

In an outstanding year for multi-platform releases (we haven't even mentioned *Dead Space*, *Rock Band* or *Mirror's Edge*), *Fallout 3* managed to stand out, not only as a revival of a classic franchise but also as one of the finest open world games ever. Bethesda's epic wasn't without its flaws (most of them technical – it *is* Bethesda, after all), but it still holds up as a magnificent experience.



DRAKE'S ON A TRAIN

Naughty Dog set the bar high with *Uncharted*, but the developer more than lived up to expectations with its sequel. From the opening escape scene aboard a perilously balanced train on top of a cliff, *Uncharted 2* never let up, and it's easily one of the PS3's best games.

NOW, FIGHT YOUR RIVAL

With no numbered release in the series since 1999, *Street Fighter IV* arrived with almost a decade's worth of expectations hanging over it. Fortunately, Capcom delivered. *SFIV* brought the series blazing onto the PS3 with a stunning inky art style and mechanics that set it firmly as one of the deepest fighting games ever.

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

There have been only a few good comic book games over the years, and so when a new *Batman* title surfaced this year, it was difficult to get excited. How wrong we were. Building on the style of the animated series, *Arkham Asylum* defied all expectations to become one of the premier titles on the PS3. It also introduced a glorious combat system that has been widely emulated in the years since.

PLAYSTATION ROCKS!

Music games were coming thick and fast and fatigue had set in, though the *Rock Band* games that hit both the PS3 and PSP were still well-received. Originality prevailed though, as Double Fine's *Brütal Legend* proved you could make a game that was immersed in musical culture, but not beholden to the genre's restrictions.



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE ROME

The first *Assassin's Creed* was met with mixed reviews, but commercially it was a huge success. When its Renaissance Italy-themed sequel arrived, however, the praise was almost unanimous. *Assassin's Creed II* upped the ante in almost every way over its predecessor, and is still arguably the series' high point.



GUNS... LOTS OF GUNS

2009 was a glorious year for shooter fanatics. Not only were gun nuts treated to their annual dose of *Call Of Duty*, they also got to experience *Red Faction Guerilla*'s destructible playground, enjoy *Borderlands*' myriad weapons and left-field humour and bask in the insane graphical fidelity of *Killzone 2*.



THE LAST GREAT PS2 GAME?

Though it would see intermittent releases for a while afterwards, 2008 marked the last hurrah for the PS2 with the release of *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4*. But what a way for the console to go out: Atlus' incredible murder-mystery-styled-RPG was immediately recognised as one of the PS2's finest games.



PERIPHERAL VISION

As if homes weren't crowded enough with plastic instruments already, 2009 saw the introduction of more gaming peripherals. In fairness, *DJ Hero*'s turntable was a decent bit of kit. The *Tony Hawk: Ride* board, on the other hand... let's just say that it was definitely 'full of technology'.



THAT SHRINKING FEELING

While there were no brand-new consoles released, 2009 did see two existing PlayStation systems remodelled with contrasting results. The PS3 Slim ushered in a sleeker, cheaper and more capacious version of the now-thriving console, while the PSP Go! ditched UMDs to deliver a more pocket-friendly handheld. It didn't take off, but it laid the groundwork for the Vita.

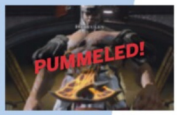


OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN

How PlayStation's greatest antihero murdered all that remained of mythology in *God Of War III*



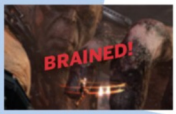
POSEIDON



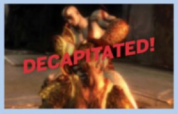
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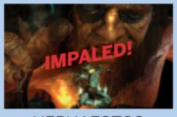
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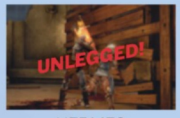
CRONOS



HELIOS



HEPHAESTOS



HERMES



ZEUS



SONY: 'WE CAN DO WHAT WII CAN DO'

The Wii's popularity hadn't gone unnoticed and Sony jumped on the motion control bandwagon with PlayStation Move, a excellent alternative to Nintendo's waggle-based input device. Minimal support from major games meant it never went mainstream, although don't bin your wands just yet – you'll be able to use them with PSVR.



TEAM PICKS



JON GORDON

FORMER NEWS EDITOR

One of my all-time favourite **Play** covers and one of my favourite features to work on was *LittleBigPlanet 2* (issue 195). I had the amazing pleasure of spending a day at Media Molecule's offices, playing the game and talking with the team and then on returning to the office, our designer started to tinker with some concepts. The way that the stitched effect was integrated into the cover, from the logo to the other cover hits, was very cool. I don't think there's ever been a **Play** cover that looks happier, either.

A PRESENT FOR EVERYONE

It's crazy to think that Sony's subscription service has been running for six years, especially since many cynics didn't think it'd get off the ground. Launched as a way to give something back to fans, the service offered a selection of free games, exclusive discounts and early access opportunities, as it still does today.



STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

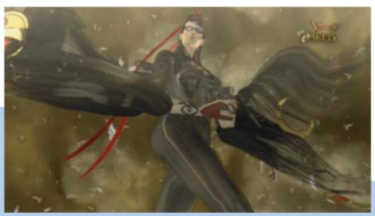
It might have looked absolutely stunning but that beauty came at a price – the vast majority of the game was extremely linear and it wasn't until you got to Gran Pulse that it really opened up. By that point, many had already given up – as good as the combat system was, there's only so much of Hope's whining while being funneled down corridors the human body can take.

PRESS X TO JASON

Having established a fusion of storytelling and what can only loosely be called gameplay with divisive PS2 adventure *Fahrenheit*, Quantic Dream applied the same techniques to the more powerful PS3 hardware for the intriguing murder-mystery game *Heavy Rain*, in which one of the heroes manages to lose both his sons in quick succession and repeatedly barks their names to comic effect, like some kind of deranged Pokémon. Jason!

PREPARE TO PREPARE TO DIE

Hardcore RPGs were nothing new for FromSoftware – the studio had been churning out *King's Field* games for years, after all. Still, with *Demon's Souls*, the team created some incredibly interesting and original mechanics that would go on to shape the legendary *Souls* franchise as we know it.



FLY ME TO THE MOON

We used to ask ourselves, 'Will *DMC3* ever be beaten in the character action genre?' But when Platinum's witch arrived, it was clear the son of Sparda had a fight on his hands. Mechanically perfect, *Bayonetta* has to be one of the earliest contenders for Game Of The Year ever, releasing in the first week of January. Better than *DMC3*? By a hair's breadth, we'd argue.

WAR GETS BIGGER

Console shooters at the time tended to limit player counts quite heavily in order to deliver a smooth experience, leading to *MAG*'s raison d'être – large-scale skirmishes that could accommodate up to 256 players at a time. It actually sold pretty well but even so, it only took a couple of high profile releases to drag players away to The Next Big Thing, making finding decent matches that played to its strengths too much of a chore to bother in the end.



TEAM PICKS



IAN DRANSFIELD

FORMER SENIOR STAFF WRITER

We were going to have an awards feature in the mag, for which then-new Editor Ryan King asked us what we thought should be the theme. I said 'The Burtons', believing that a set of awards themed around *Resident Evil* icon and personal hero Barry Burton would be very funny indeed. King agreed. We ran with it. There isn't a feature in my entire career I've laughed harder at. As mad wartime propagandist Doctor Seuss once said: 'Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened'.

"DARK SOULS WILL BE REMEMBERED AS ONE OF THE BEST GAMES EVER"

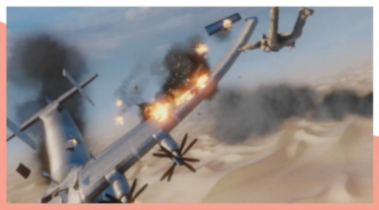


A LEGEND RETURNS

Deus Ex: Human Revolution combined four disparate gameplay styles and – somehow – it worked brilliantly.

FACIAL CAPTURE EVOLVES

Although motion capture had found its form before this in titles like *Heavy Rain* and *Uncharted*, the technology used to capture that bloke from *Mad Men* and others for this love letter to *L.A. Confidential* set the bar on PS3. *L.A. Noire* was a bloody good game at times, too.



NATE GROWS UP

Many of us will still claim that *Uncharted 2* was an impossible act to follow – it was, by all accounts, one of the best games of the PS3 generation. Because of this, *Uncharted 3* gets a little bit of a bad rap, but it shouldn't, as it was a conscious effort from Naughty Dog to evolve. We should at least mark it as the point where Naughty Dog flexed its narrative muscles.

YOU DIED

It's true that *Demon's Souls* set the template and lent an awful lot to it in terms of tone and systems, but *Dark Souls* will be remembered as one of the best games ever. Two sequels have followed and have only served to remind us of how this game was a mysterious, morose and macabre masterpiece.

PUZZLE GAMES GO BERSERK

To divulge any more than the basics of *Catherine* would do it a disservice – it needs to be seen to be believed. Let's just say that this is considered one of the hardest games around and combines brutal puzzle-platforming with sheep, infidelity and multiple endings.



TOY STORY

Some of you may sniff at this, but *Skylanders* was a game changer. The amount of toys-to-life figurines and games that Activision has shifted since this first iteration landed is preposterous – a true phenomenon that built a genre from the ground up and helped shape the market for younger gamers as it is now. Also, whether you like it or not, *Skylanders* games are pretty fun...

FIVE MUST-PLAY SEQUELS

THE STARS ALIGNED AND 2011 BROUGHT WITH IT NO LESS THAN FIVE AWESOME SOPHOMORE EFFORTS



MASS EFFECT 2

After BioWare casually reinvented space-faring RPGs with *Mass Effect*, the follow-up became one of the most critically acclaimed games ever. A genuine masterpiece.

PORTAL 2

This was the year that puzzle games became cool again. *Portal 2* is challenging, but it's also a fantastic split-screen co-op experience.

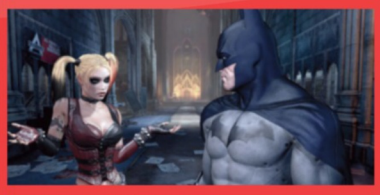


DEAD SPACE 2

After the understated approach of the original, *Dead Space 2* expanded into action territory a little more, heralding one of the best third-person horror experiences ever.

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

Rather than just the platforming fun of the original, *LBP2* offered so much more to budding creators, including racing games!



BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

Asylum had been a surprise hit in 2009 – the sequel saw Rocksteady commit to open-world gameplay and Bats had a whole city to explore.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

It may be the lowest-rated mainline *Resident Evil* game on Metacritic, but that didn't stop *Resi 6* selling absurdly well. Some feel it's too bloated with its 'three games in one' approach, but we maintain it's a great thrill ride (Leon's sections especially) and a worthy follow-up to *Resi 5*.

DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS

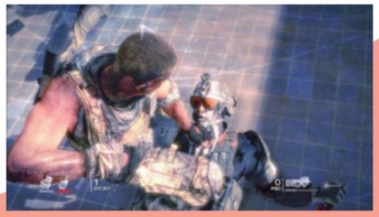
Journey from thatgamecompany built on the abstractness of *Flow* and *Flower* and delivered one of gaming's most memorable experiences. It offers a unique take on multiplayer, letting you cooperate with anonymous randoms without any traditional form of communication. Magical.

GOTTA GO FAST

All-Stars Racing Transformed improved on its predecessor. The ability to transform between different vehicle types added greatly to the karting gameplay, while the dynamic track designs evolved too, ensuring every lap felt fresh and exciting. It features an insane amount of fan service and unlockable content, too.

LOVING THE ALIEN

XCOM: Enemy Unknown remains one of the PS3's best games and works far better than it should considering its PC origins. It's instantly accessible but brutally tough and incredibly deep, with endlessly absorbing gameplay.



WAR IS HELL

Spec-Ops: The Line is one of the most intelligent blasters the PlayStation has ever seen. Its Dubai backdrop still makes it feel fresh and different, while *that* walk after a white phosphorus attack will stay with you forever.

ROBOT WARS

The voice command elements of *Binary Domain* are terrible, but this quirky shooter from the Yakuza team still feels like a breath of fresh air. The plot is bat-shit crazy, while the epic bosses are a joy to systematically dismantle.

SONY'S HANDHELD POWERHOUSE

Not since the original PlayStation has any console had such an impressive range of launch games. The late European launch saw virtually every genre catered for, while the cutting-edge visuals and beautiful screen made it stand apart from Nintendo's 3D-obsessed competitor. Sadly, the Vita's strong launch line-up and decent support soon began to dwindle and it became increasingly apparent that Sony didn't know what to do with its high-powered handheld.

Support for it today is mostly based around indie games, although a few brave publishers continue to support it with physical releases. These factors ensure it's going to be highly collectible in years to come. Still, *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* was everything you need from a launch game. It impressed on a technical level, highlighted (sometimes annoyingly) the new capabilities of the Vita and features one of the best stories in the *Uncharted* series.

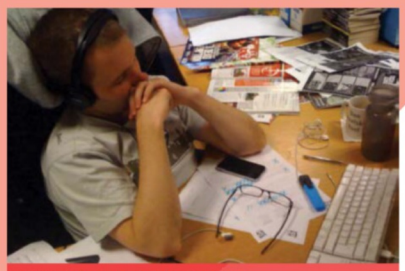


A SHOOTY LOOTY BEAUTY

'Epic' is the best way to sum up Gearbox's sequel. *Borderlands 2* is loot drop nirvana, offering some ridiculous weapons (especially on higher difficulties), greatly enhanced player characters and Handsome Jack, one of the best antagonists of recent memory. Whilst the standalone game is gigantic in itself, it's supported by a staggering amount of genuinely great downloadable content – *Tiny Tina's Assault On Dragon Keep* being our favourite – that will take an age to complete. Little wonder it sold over 13 million units...

ADVENTURE COMES BACK FROM THE DEAD

Yes, *The Walking Dead* was hampered by the same crappy engine that plagues all of Telltale's games, but it's all forgotten once you start playing. Great characters, strong narration and brutal set-pieces soon make you forget that the choices you make aren't as impactful as you were initially led to believe.



TEAM PICKS



RYAN KING
FORMER EDITOR

There were lots of running jokes on **Play** – Andy's obsession with *Skyrim*, Burns and his pseudonyms, McMahon's continued employment. But one thing I always loved was sneaking hungover Dan Peel into the mag when he fell asleep at his desk the day after the work Christmas party. We had to sneak it under Lara, but here's the full picture all these years later! A **Play** WORLD EXCLUSIVE.





FOR THE PLAYERS

After a console generation that lasted forever, PlayStation 4 came along and changed everything. February saw the announcement of the most important Sony console to date. After the bungled launch of PlayStation 3, all eyes were on Sony – on top of the bad press surrounding its launch, PS3 was unduly thrashed by Xbox 360 in terms of uptake, meaning the previous generation had well and truly belonged to Microsoft. After a reveal event in February that got the world hyped for the console and a solid showing at E3, PS4 arrived in November with the promise of change, if not with all of the promised games – numerous delays saw the likes of *Driveclub*, *Watch Dogs* and *inFamous: Second Son* miss launch but at least we got *Resogun*. Well, that and a bunch of other decent stuff, actually.

You see, it wasn't just a revamped controller, superior architecture and a community spirit that Sony promised with the release of PS4 – the main focus was games, games, games. Launch titles included sci-fi FPS *Killzone Shadow Fall*, the brilliant *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*, *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and the sublime *Resogun*.

DEEPER UNDERGROUND

Despite being pegged as a PS4 launch title, delays meant that *Minecraft* launched on PS3 first in December 2013. Even by this point Mojang's world-building game was already a phenomenon on PC and Xbox 360, but 2013 finally saw it released on a PlayStation platform, and PS4 and Vita versions followed in 2014.

NANOMACHINES, SON!

It seemed too good to be true – Platinum, fresh off the back of *Bayonetta*, jumping into bed with Kojima's stealth series and taking a very non-stealth approach to it. *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*'s fast-paced, challenging hack-and-slash gameplay and awesome soundtrack resulted in a fresh take on the IP.

CAN THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?

It starts on a boat. "He doesn't row," says a strange man in a raincoat. If you've played *BioShock Infinite*, you'll know what this *really* means, but at this early point, it served as an unassuming moment that prefaced what we think is one of the greatest opening sequences of all time. After launching from a lighthouse, the moment where Booker DeWitt breaks through the clouds and softly descends into a church is visually stunning and superbly realised.

FULL TIME FOR PS2

As well as being a year of new horizons for PlayStation, 2013 also saw the release of the last ever PlayStation 2 game – *PES 2014*. Whether or not Konami's unlicensed, underperforming football sim was a fitting farewell for the most successful console of all time is open for debate. Just don't ask our boy Paul... he's *PES* mad..



NAUGHTY DOG REWRITES THE RULEBOOK

20 years from now, there will be some games that still stand out in the memory as being truly exceptional. Sure, the AI wasn't as good as we hoped it would be and stealth encounters could be frustrating, but *The Last Of Us* is still a masterpiece. It showed us proper direction, unparalleled acting and writing that put all other games to shame. It showed us that truly *adult* games aren't the ones full of blood and guts – they're the ones that make you feel something.

TEAM PICKS



LUKE ALBIGÉS
EDITOR

After the actual PS4 hardware was revealed at E3 in June, I made it my mission to get hold of one before anyone else, and I managed to. Well, sort of. 45,000 nagging phone calls and emails to Sony later, we finally got the green light to visit its offices in London with a photographer in tow to spend an afternoon in the company of one of only a handful of PS4 consoles in the world at the time. It was a great day and we came back with some amazing shots, showing off the anticipated console like nobody had ever seen it before and the resulting feature was one of my favourites that we've run.



V REASONS WHY GTA V WAS BLOODY GREAT

I It legitimately shouldn't have worked on PS3 hardware. The tech was utterly insane.

II Mechanics were much improved over the floaty and frequently irritating *GTA IV*.

III It was the worst (and therefore best) representation of society so far.

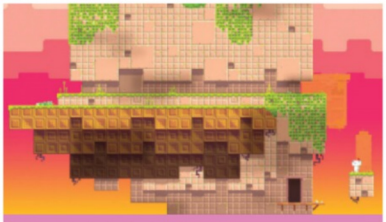
IV Los Santos was – and still is – an absolute joy to explore.

V It was undeniably one of the most content-rich games ever made.



CHIEFTAIN WILL REMEMBER THAT

Tolkien's fantasy saga has long used as a launchpad for 6/10 action games, so it was great to finally see a studio make creative use of the Middle-earth license. *Shadow Of Mordor* played things relatively safe with its combat, but the Nemesis system – whereby enemies could grow and improve if you let them live – was a stroke of genius.



TEAM PICKS



REBECCA RICHARDS

FORMER SUB EDITOR

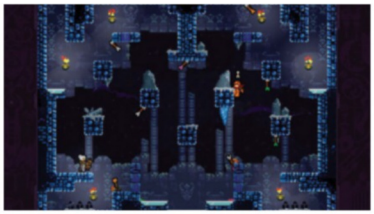
After sitting hunched over on a laptop for two years, enjoying as much as I could the emotional rollercoaster of frustratingly sublime puzzle-solving and cube-hunting while blissing out to a phenomenal chiptune soundtrack, it finally happened. In 2014, *Fez* made the move from PC to PS4. Rich and bright in glorious pixel art detail, it was a real pleasure to play through it from scratch and review it for **Play** issue 243, discovering again its worlds within with a joyful sense of discovery and achievement. In 2014, I described *Fez* as being "at the top of its genre" – it absolutely still is.

TO THE LOOT CAVE!

It might have been extremely light on content at launch but that didn't stop hardcore players (including the entire **Play** team save for Paul, who exclusively plays indie games and *PES*) absolutely rinsing the game. As well as cheesing raid bosses, watching entire groups unload onto constantly respawning enemies for loot was an early highlight – seeing Rahool turn all our Engrams into junk afterwards, not so much.

MEMORY LAPSE

More *Souls* is never a bad thing, although *Dark Souls II* – developed by a largely different team to the previous game – had huge shoes to fill and only just got away with it. It was good, don't get us wrong... it just didn't quite have that same spark, at least not until the DLC dropped and the *Scholar Of The First Sin* edition tied all that great extra content together.



HEY MAN, NICE SHOT

Gone are the days when *TowerFall* was an Ouya exclusive (yes, really) and now, it's our PS4 party game of choice. Landing a perfect long-range snipe, baiting a cheeky wraparound attack, stomping rivals as they get greedy and rush power-ups, dodging perfectly to catch your opponent's last arrow... not a match goes by without a few highlight reel moments. And then it's accidentally six in the morning. Oops.



RUNNING SCARED

One of the leading names in strategy gaming making a horror game based on the *Alien* licence where there's just one alien... it could all have gone so horribly wrong but somehow, *Alien: Isolation* turned out to be one of the best horror experiences in years. Knowing that *thing* was stalking you made for some cripplingly tense passages of play.



TIMMY!

There have been so many bad *South Park* games over the years that we had started to believe that it was impossible to actually make a good one. RPG veterans Obsidian set the record straight with *The Stick Of Truth*, though – it might not have been the deepest or most complex adventure out there, but it was so steeped in fan service, authenticity and in-jokes that fans couldn't have asked for more.

"THE RUNNING JOKE OF THE PS4 LAUNCH, DRIVECLUB GOT STUCK IN TRAFFIC FOR NEARLY A WHOLE YEAR"

"KAZ, I'M ALREADY A DEMO"

We get the feeling that *Ground Zeroes* only came out because Konami wanted Kojima to prove to the world that *MGSV* was actually in development, rather than just some dream that would never materialise. We're glad that happened, because this taster of what to expect was both technically and mechanically superb.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

The running joke of the PS4 launch, *Driveclub* got stuck in traffic and ended up missing the console's release by the best part of a year. Even when it did turn up, it was still missing a bunch of stuff that was promised when it was revealed – it has since been updated with all of that and more, mind, as is really damn good as a result.



THE E3 OF DREAMS

We all heard the rumours. But, as you always have to do, every one was either written off as mere speculation or enjoyed with liberal sprinklings of salt. And then Sony's bomber flew over LA and just carpet-bombed the conference with megaton announcements the likes of which we'll probably never see again. *Final Fantasy VII* remake? Happening. *Shenmue III*? Go on then. *The Last Guardian*? Yep, coming to PS4. For a good half-hour or so, our jaws remained at ground level. Truly something to behold, especially considering these things can go Giant Enemy Crab bad.

CABIN IN THE WOODS

When we played *Until Dawn* at preview stage, we got the impression that it wasn't going to be very good. But as it turns out, playing one sequence in isolation without any sense of the way your choices could have serious repercussions down the line is far from the best showcase for this tongue-in-cheek horror game, leading to this being one of the most pleasant gaming surprises of the year. It looks stunning, too.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Okay, so it's only a few hours long and sits in a letterboxed screen that leaves ungainly black borders above and below the action. But as a demonstration of what the PS4 can do, *The Order: 1886* is yet to be touched, although we're sure Drake will be having words with Grayson in the next month. For what it's worth, it's a surprisingly tight cover shooter, too. Ignore all the hate and check it out on its own merits.

JACK ATTACK

Telltale, known best in recent times for its affecting moral choices in *The Walking Dead*. *Borderlands*, a cartoon shooter known best for its potty mouth, stupid guns and love of memes. How this collaboration ever got off the ground is a mystery to us, but we're sure glad it did – *Tales From The Borderlands* is right up there with *TWD*'s first season as the episodic experts' finest work. You don't even need to be a fan of the Gearbox shooters to tell that this is something truly special, and Handsome Jack remains gaming's most lovable asshole.

V HAS COME TO

We've had a bit of time to dwell on it now and while the lack of any real payoff certainly hurts *Metal Gear Solid V* from a narrative perspective, the fact remains that its fusion of stealth and action gameplay mechanics is absolutely best in class. Now that Kojima has gone off to do his own thing, it's highly unlikely that we'll see another *Metal Gear* game that matters (unless Platinum comes good with *Revengeance 2*, of course), so that will have to do.

THE TIME IS NOW

After numerous betas and trials around the world, PlayStation Now finally launched in Europe this year. The streaming service still currently only runs a selection of PS3 games, but the technology is there for everything from the first PSone games to the most recent PS4 releases to work this way on practically any device more powerful than a fridge, so we're looking forward to seeing how the service evolves as internet connections improve to better accommodate this kind of high-bandwidth streaming functionality.

GETTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER

Rhythm-action didn't deserve to go out the way it did. You can't even place the blame on any one party – Activision, for all its milking of *Guitar Hero*, still managed to innovate in the genre by green-lighting the excellent DJ Hero games, while Harmonix managed to support its trio of *Rock Band* games with DLC on a near-weekly basis. That said, *GH Live* and *Rock Band 4* weren't quite the comebacks the genre deserved, either – the former's online model divided opinion, while the latter shipped in a bare-bones state, if you can even manage to find a copy at all. Here's hoping both continue to grow, because music games are awesome.



BEAST MODE

A new IP from the core *Dark Souls* team was always going to be a reason to get excited, so Sony landing *Bloodborne* as a PS4 exclusive was a coup. Taking the lore in an even bleaker, more Lovecraftian direction made it even more interesting, and the focus on aggression in combat proved to be a refreshing change from the *Souls*' usual patient confrontations.

THE NEVER-ENDING RPG

To this day, we're not entirely convinced that *The Witcher 3* even has an ending. It's just too big. Even people who have seen the credits can jump back into the game and find they still have just shy of infinity quests to finish up, if they can manage to avoid the trap of just playing Gwent until the end of time. Quite how CDPR managed to create this much content in a game that looks so good, we'll never know.

AN ODE TO ROCKET LEAGUE



LIAM WARR
DESIGNER

During my time on **Play** I've discovered two things. Writing haikus in birthday cards is hilarious, and *Rocket League* is literally the best game ever made. This is my love letter.

Nice shot! What a save!
Thanks for my DeLorean.
gg ez noob.

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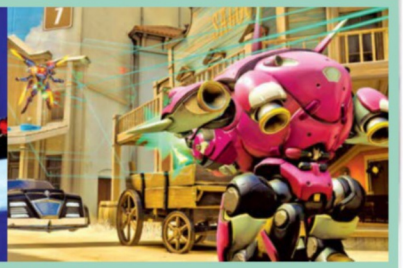
MIND BLOWN

You can't take any one puzzle from *The Witness* out of context. That's the one thing we've learned by having numerous people walk in on us playing it only to comment on how what we're fumbling with is 'just another maze puzzle' – none of it makes sense without progression. Each screen serves to teach how rules work and can be bent and broken, eventually serving to develop a visual language that can't be picked up halfway through the course. Incredible stuff.

LINKING THE FIRE

Ever since it was made public that Hidetaka Miyazaki, the mastermind behind the original *Dark Souls*, was heading up this 'final' sequel, we had high hopes that it would deliver. And it sure as hell does, as you can find out in our review on page 68. It's a lot more directly linked to the first game than we expected, but that allows it to deliver a sense of continuation and closure that we really weren't expecting from the game. Well played, Miyazaki.





MOBAS EXPLODE ONTO CONSOLE

While it's been a big deal on PC for some time, the MOBA genre has constantly struggled to break into the console market. All that is about to change, however, with BAFTA-winning *Smite* and the stunning *Paragon* both playable right now and with FPS hybrids *Battleborn* and *Overwatch* both just around the corner. Brilliantly, MOBAs are where the big money is when it comes to competitive gaming, so train up and you could be on track for a new job.



DRAKE'S DEPARTURE

The wait is almost over – Drake's last adventure, is just around the corner and for anyone who has been on the fence about getting a PS4 until now, the decision is about to get a whole lot easier. We don't even need to have the finished article in our hands right now to know that it's going to be amazing – we've seen and played enough of it to make that call early. If you still need convincing, check back in with our first digital-only issue next month. We'll have the full scoop for you then, once we've smashed the final game and rinsed multiplayer!



THE FUTURE OF PLAY



As you may already have read in my editorial this month, this issue will be the last time we print our fine words onto paper – from now on, we'll be printing our no-nonsense PlayStation advice, critique and guidance directly onto the internet! If you've got a tablet, a computer or even a phone that you'd be happy to read on, please follow us along for the ride. We're as scared as you are (unless you're not scared, in which case we're considerably more scared) to be making this brave leap to digital-only distribution but in this tech-savvy era, more and more people would rather have a digital product than one they can hold in their hands. Play 270 will be headed straight to tablets and the like toward the end of May, when we'll have a full review of *Uncharted 4* and a bunch more besides. It's been one hell of a ride, so thank you all from the bottom of my heart, but the fun ain't over yet. Not by a long shot!

LUKE ALBIGÉS
EDITOR

25 REASONS OVERWATCH COULD BE YOUR NEW FAVOURITE SHOOTER

Blizzard's second PS4 game is about to explode onto the crowded FPS battlefield – here's what we learned from our hands-on time with Overwatch



1 IT'S NOT A MOBA

Don't go expecting a *League Of Legends*-like experience from *Overwatch* – its pace and intensity (as well as the lack of item builds or any of that noise) mean this is something far more straightforward. Think *Team Fortress* with a few more class options, or *Destiny* PvP with actual balancing. Blizzard is offering a competitive FPS that takes a few cues from the MOBA scene, but *Overwatch* is very much its own beast.

2 ... BUT IT SORT OF IS

Sure, you've got specialised Heroes who all have their own abilities and fit into different roles within their respective teams. But while games like Gearbox's *Battleborn* try their best to make the MOBA genre work in first-person by slowing the action down to compensate for tactical play, *Overwatch* instead takes the best elements from the emerging genre and kneads them until they coalesce properly with its first-person shooter gameplay and the result is something that is truly exhilarating.

3 DESIGNED FOR ESPORTS

Blizzard has looked at the competitive scene and seen a gap in the market between the jargon-heavy world of the MOBA and the typically 'simple' FPS, the result being a game that has depth and dependence on team play. Damage is high, so highlight reel moments are common – although you *can* limp back to base to recuperate, you generally won't be offered that luxury.

4 YOU'VE GOT COD ON YOU

Black Ops III tapped into MOBA culture by offering unique Specialists instead of a single customisable war-goer, and that know-how is apparently being shared with the *Overwatch* team – Activision and Blizzard being best of friends means that Treyarch has shared its secrets with the team to create something truly special and taking a lead from the best *COD* in recent years is no bad thing in our book.

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5 PS4/PC PARITY

According to Blizzard, the PC and console versions of *Overwatch* will be the same in terms of content. That's pretty cool, considering so many cross-platform games tend to focus on the PC version. This means that whatever your friends are playing, you can play too – you won't be waiting for a patch to try out a new character or rebalanced ability. The line between the 'PC Master Race' and consoles is getting pretty blurry.

6 THERE'S NO CROSS-PLAY

That said, you won't be able to play with others who are on different platforms. While that might usually be a negative thing, it's not in this case – controllers don't offer the instant twitch reactions of a mouse-and-keyboard setup and good PC players would kick your ass. All of it. And they wouldn't stop kicking. Trust us on this one. Assuming the game picks up enough traction, parity is probably for the best. We'd much rather have a level playing field with other PS4 owners than PC players taking us to school.

7 BLIZZARD DOESN'T MAKE BAD GAMES

Like, come on. Name one. You can't? Oh, that's weird. Maybe it's because *Blizzard doesn't make bad games. Diablo*, *WOW*, *Hearthstone*... this is a studio that regularly showcases excellence and we can say with some conviction that *Overwatch* isn't the game that will screw that track record over. As previously discussed, the team even has some world-leading FPS experts on hand to make this work. Y'know, just in case.

8 FOUR PLAYABLE CLASSES

The best thing about *Overwatch* is that it offers rewarding roles to even those who may not like traditional first-person shooters. Damage-dealers are certainly welcome, of course, but defensive DPS builds, tanks and support characters are all championed as well – whether you like to drop turrets and supplies for your team or hit enemies in their stupid faces with things, you're probably good. It draws quite a clear comparison with *Team Fortress*, in that respect, and it works to *Overwatch*'s advantage.



△○×□ Mercy and Pharah make a great team – buffed rockets are great for area denial, or simply piling on crazy damage.









△○×□ You can't have a Hero-based multiplayer game without an archer character, it's the law.

9 YOU CAN PLAY AS A GORILLA

Winston isn't your typical ape – he has a badass lightning gun that chains damage between targets, a shield bubble to defend the team, a rage mode that sees him go absolutely HAM and a powerful leap which we're still struggling to land consistently. He's basically all three *Destiny* Titan sub-classes rolled into one, only in the guise of a support character. Weird, but cool. He's also subject of the *Overwatch* short film, *Recall*.

10 ALL MODES ARE TEAM-BASED

The simple truth is that free-for-all competitive modes wouldn't work with this roster of characters. Healers such as Mercy simply don't have the damage output to compete toe-to-toe with a high damage mobile kill machine such as Tracer – hell, pretty much every Tank or Support character would lose a DPS war with an attack-focused character. There are plenty of other games that can scratch that itch for you anyway, so it's never really missed.

11 HIGHLIGHT REEL FINISHES

At the end of each match, you're treated to a Play Of The Game replay of what the game considers the most impressive segment of the battle. This seems to be based largely on score, so it's not always actually that impressive – it could just be a well-placed Ultimate or a few good snipes in succession. Here's hoping Blizzard can tweak the algorithms to recognise genuine turning points, but it's a cool feature even as it stands.

12 RANKED MIGHT BE LATE

Balance is key to any kind of ranked online game mode and with *Overwatch* still in beta with release just around the corner, that process is far from over. As such, don't be surprised if the Ranked playlist misses launch – it might make it, but Blizzard will be waiting until the playing field is completely level before it opens the gates. Trust us when we say that's definitely for the best.

13 GOTTA GO FAST

We've established that *Overwatch* isn't a typical MOBA but even so, the pace of the game can be quite overwhelming considering how methodical objective-based games and modes tend to be. Mistakes can be quickly punished and relatively short respawn timers keep the action flowing, ensuring that the adrenaline never stops pumping. It's pretty damn intense, frankly, but in a really good way.

14 NO CHARACTER PROGRESSION

Once you pick a character, you get access to all of their abilities – each character's Ultimate ability needs to 'charge', mind. There's no skill selection, no upgrade trees, no prioritising one ability over another – it's all unlocked from the off. While this might be a turn-off for MOBA fans who like working out their own builds, it's sure going to help with balancing, since Blizzard need only worry about tweaking base abilities rather than various different tiers.

15 CARE PACKAGE INBOUND

It may not have in-match levelling but *Overwatch* will still be letting you grow as a player. Perform well and you'll level up, earning a loot drop for your trouble. Since gear is all locked into the characters, this is all cosmetic. But with win poses, taunts and outfits to unlock, there's still plenty to work towards. Also, Blizzard is a master at making loot drops feel rewarding – try opening a card pack in *Hearthstone* as an example.

16 TAILORED REWARDS

One of the best things about the loot system is that it won't take the piss by giving you five of the same taunts in a row. If, on opening a reward, the roll gives you something you already have, you'll apparently instead receive an in-game cash alternative, eventually letting you have another throw of the dice. As former owners of 20+ Crests Of Alpha Lupi from Exotic Engrams in *Destiny*, we approve.

















KNOW YOUR ROLE

How the four classes stack up, and what they all do

OFFENSE

GENJI, MCCREE, PHARAH, REAPER, SOLDIER: 76, TRACER

While these guys can pile on the hurt like nobody else, that high damage output comes at a cost – it might be a smaller health pool or lower effective range than other characters, for instance. A skilled and/or well-supported Offense Hero will be scary, but reckless play is easily punished.

DEFENSE

BASTION, HANZO, JUNKRAT, MEI, TORBJÖRN, WIDOWMAKER

This secondary wave of DPS characters trades damage for safety, using damage mitigation or long-distance play to reduce risk. Abilities – such as Bastion's shield – can be used to create choke points or make area denial plays, so this lot are typically useful when protecting an objective.

SUPPORT

LÚCIO, MERCY, SYMMETRA, ZENYATTA

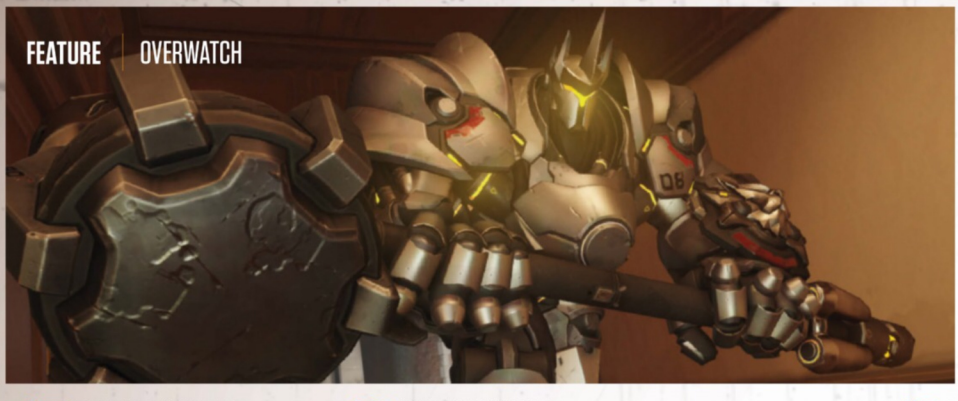
Their damage output may be low, but that's not the point – if you play a Support Hero, your role is to buff, heal and assist other players rather than worry about your own K/D. So long as your allies can keep you safe, the significant advantages each option offers can turn the tide of battle.

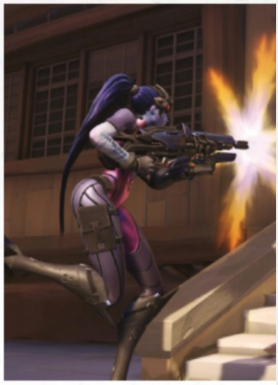
TANK

D.VA, REINHARDT, ROADHOG, WINSTON, ZARYA

Whether through large health pools or armour, these fighters are typically the hardest Heroes to take down. Damage and/or mobility tend to take a hit to compensate, but handy disruption-based abilities tend to mean the enemy has little choice but to focus fire so as to protect high-value targets.







17 HYBRID MODES ARE COOL

While jarring at first, the fact that you simply queue to play a game of anything rather than for a specific game mode is actually really cool. It means you never know what the fight will entail until you're in – it might be a few rounds of area control, an escort mission, zone control or some novel combination of the lot. It really helps keep you on your toes, as well as cycling between Heroes. It also ensures that the wait times between matches will be kept to a minimum.

18 MANAGE YOUR COOLDOWNS

The very mention of a word like 'cooldowns' ties into MOBA and MMO culture, but don't worry – *Destiny* is a far more accessible touchstone for the way in which abilities work in *Overwatch*, especially if you're not au fait with that world. Each skill on your HUD slowly refills after use, so you can see at a glance what's ready to use. Given that many abilities work well in tandem, this will pretty much dictate the pace you can play at.

△○×□ You know what feels really strange? Charging into battle in an FPS without a gun...

19 ONGOING BALANCING

Blizzard isn't the kind of studio to just throw games out there and forget that they exist – just as has happened during the beta (and even before), there will most likely be all kinds of balance adjustments, mode tweaks and map modifications once the game is out and a real sense of its dominant forces can be established. Don't expect any Hero or power to stay OP for long – Blizzard already has its nerf hammer at the ready.



OVERWATCH BY THE NUMBERS

54,264

Amount of possible different six-character team combinations – factor in duplicate Heroes and that figure more than QUADRUPLES.

1

How many complaints it took about Tracer's odd pose to get Blizzard to change it.

129 YEARS

The collective amount of time played in a single closed beta weekend late last year. That's over 1.13 million hours squeezed into just 48 – the equivalent of 100,000 people playing around six hours per day each.

870

Total unlockable skins, emotes, poses, quotes and tags in the beta version alone.

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"DON'T EXPECT ANY HERO OR POWER TO STAY OP FOR LONG, AS BLIZZARD HAS ITS NERF HAMMER AT THE READY"

20 IT LOOKS RATHER GOOD

There are often sacrifices to be made visually when it comes to getting an online game up and running smoothly, but not here. Everything from the style and design to animations and effects are on point – Blizzard isn't doing things by halves, whether you're a fan of the cartoony style or not. Even the menus and UI exude class, which is something very rare indeed.

21 THAT'S HOW MANY HEROES THERE ARE

Which is enough, at least for now. More than one player can pick the same Hero too, so it's not like you're locked out of repping your favourite if someone else gets there first. It's easy enough to hop into the solo modes to get a feel for each Hero's weapons and abilities, though, so that should be your first port of call when you fire the game up for the first time.

△○×□ While weak against single targets, the lightning gun is a beast when it comes to crowd control.

22 MORE HEROES ARE COMING

Don't think that what you see day one will be all you will ever have to play with. Blizzard is famously good when it comes to post-launch support – PC classic *Diablo II* recently got a new patch *16 years after launch* – and this will extend to all aspects of *Overwatch*, including characters. Like *Street Fighter V*, it'll be an evolving platform where there's always something new to try out.

23 UPDATES WILL BE FREE...

As they should be, since adding layers of paid content into online games only serves to fragment the user base. Still, it's reassuring to know going into the game and we look forward to seeing how it evolves post-launch – the ingredients are there for something special and even if it ends up falling short, these updates could pull it back from the *Brink*. Get it?

24 BUT THE GAME WON'T

Shortly after it was announced, the assumption was that *Overwatch* would join the free-to-play army, but that is not the case. It's an actual, proper thing that you have to go out and *buy*, but the production values as soon as you boot it up tell you as much – we can count the number of F2P games that look this good and play this well on one hand, and with several fingers to spare.

25 YOU CAN PLAY SOON

Overwatch is damn good and you don't need to take our word for it – there's an open beta running in early May ahead of the game's launch and you can get in even earlier if you pre-order. It's probably a bit late for that now but still, open beta... good news, right? Get involved and hopefully, you'll enjoy Blizzard's FPS debut as much as we have been so far.

INDIEVELOPMENT

Our indie expert Paul Walker-Emig delves into the exciting, strange and intriguing world of indie development to pick out the best of what's coming to PlayStation





△○×□ *Furi* will periodically pull you in close to force you to go toe-to-toe in deadly melee bouts.

WE'VE HAD ONE eye on boss-battler **FURI** for quite some time, but now that we've had a look at a full unedited ten minutes of its intense melee combat, blended with bullet hell shooting, it has really grabbed our attention. It would seem that a lot of the game is about avoiding damage – parrying melee attacks, dodging bullets and using your dash to cut through area-of-effect attacks. From there, it's about picking your moment to strike back with your sword or your gun. It appears you've got a number of options on that front – you can charge shots from your gun and we suspect that parries open up bosses for more damaging strikes. Cutting down the bosses' health moves the encounters into new stages where they change their approach as the difficulty is ramped up. Speaking of which, this is clearly not an easy game. Playing out at an insanely fast pace from the get-go, *Furi* still manages to notch up the intensity, throwing more and more at you to test your reactions and skill as the electronic soundtrack ebbs and flows to reflect the oscillating pace of combat brilliantly. We love boss battles when they're done well – the feeling you get from taking on an opponent that requires all your focus, and has to be treated as an equal, can be thrilling. If *Furi* can capture that in all of its boss encounters, then we'll be very happy indeed.



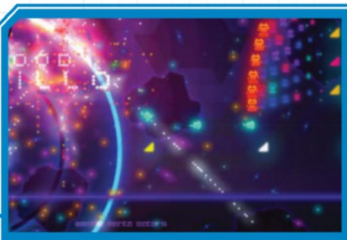


It would seem that speed and difficulty are becoming something of a theme here, because our next game is another that is all about quick reactions and challenging stages. Coming to PS4 and Vita, **10 SECOND NINJA X** is a game that gives you a paltry ten seconds to complete each of its stages. It's a bit like *Super Meat Boy* played against the clock, except that you're a ninja who kills robots. Expect lots of quick restarts, expect frustration,



but also expect it to be rewarding and compulsive. That's what made the original *10 Second Ninja* a success and that is what we hope will make this game successful too.

We're not going to let up on the fast-paced and skill intensive games just yet, because it is time to talk about **VIDEOBALL**. The game is a top-down multiplayer title that puts you in control of a triangle in games of 1v1, 2v2 and 3v3. The objective of the game is to



DEV DIARY

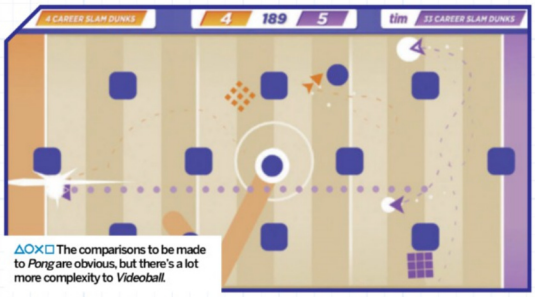
Rob Fearon on bringing *Death Ray Manta* to PlayStation

I've managed to reduce the amount of draw calls quite substantially. It's hard to understate just how slack the original *DRM* code is and can be because it's designed for a PC with plenty of overhead. Undoing some of the worst of that gave me a massive speed boost. There's still some issues with scaling sprites to tackle excessively but that's okay, I'll replace those with new effects.

I'm pretty happy with the visual balance so the next step is to rework and batch collisions to be more sane in order to avoid bringing the Vita to its knees again...

utilise your ability to shoot projectiles in order to knock a ball into your opponent's goal – simple, right? Only requiring the use of one button and one stick, the idea is that *Videoball* will be one of those games that's very easy to pick up, but also offers the potential for skill and strategy that turns it into something that's far more in-depth than it might initially appear. The ability to charge shots, knock your enemy out of position, block shots aimed at you and nullify enemy projectiles all add a layer of complexity to this chaotic and minimalist sports game. Granted, it's tough to knock *Rocket League* from its position as the current king of fictional sport, but we can still see ourselves getting really into this one.

After all that speed and intensity, let's wind down with something nice and calming. **EVERYTHING** is a game that takes the concept that forms the backbone of *Wild* – in that you can possess and play as any animal in the



△○×□ The comparisons to be made to *Pong* are obvious, but there's a lot more complexity to *Videoball*.



"IN EVERYTHING, YOU CAN PLAY AS LITERALLY ANYTHING THAT YOU CAN SEE IN THE GAME"





△○×□ The first thing we will do when we play *Everything* is see what it is like to be a burrito.

game – and pushes it to its zenith. In *Everything*, you can play as literally anything that you can see in the game. "If you ever wanted to see what it's like to be a horse, or a paperclip, or the sun, this is for you," goes the pitch from *Everything*'s developer, David O'Reilly. He describes it as "a game about the things we see, their relationships, and their points of view." Intriguing, but also cryptic –it tells us very little about what the experience of playing the game will *actually* be like. The fact that O'Reilly has said that you will have other powers besides 'being something' suggests there's more to the game than just possessing things and seeing the world from their viewpoint, but we'll have to wait and see if the game is as compelling as it is ambitious. Regardless, as we've said before, we love PlayStation for offering us these kinds of weird and unique titles.

FUNDED

STRENGTH OF THE SWORD ULTIMATE

PLATFORMS: PS4/VITA
ETA: 2017



We're fans of the original version of *Strength Of The Sword 3* on PS3 (you can read our review in issue 234), so we're delighted to see that the game's ultimate version has been a success on Kickstarter. The game will add to the core of its tough skill-based melee battles with new modes that include co-op, survival and PvP, as well as increased customisation options.

WISHLIST

STRAFE



Strafe pitches itself as an artifact straight out of 1996, taking the speed, violence and ostentation of old-school FPS titles like *Wolfenstein*, *Doom* and *Quake* as its template and then attempts to push those core elements to their most ridiculous extremes (with its tongue firmly in cheek). The result is a shooter with loads of awesome-looking guns that you can use to gib and vaporise the hordes of enemies that will be coming your way.

IF YOU LOVE...

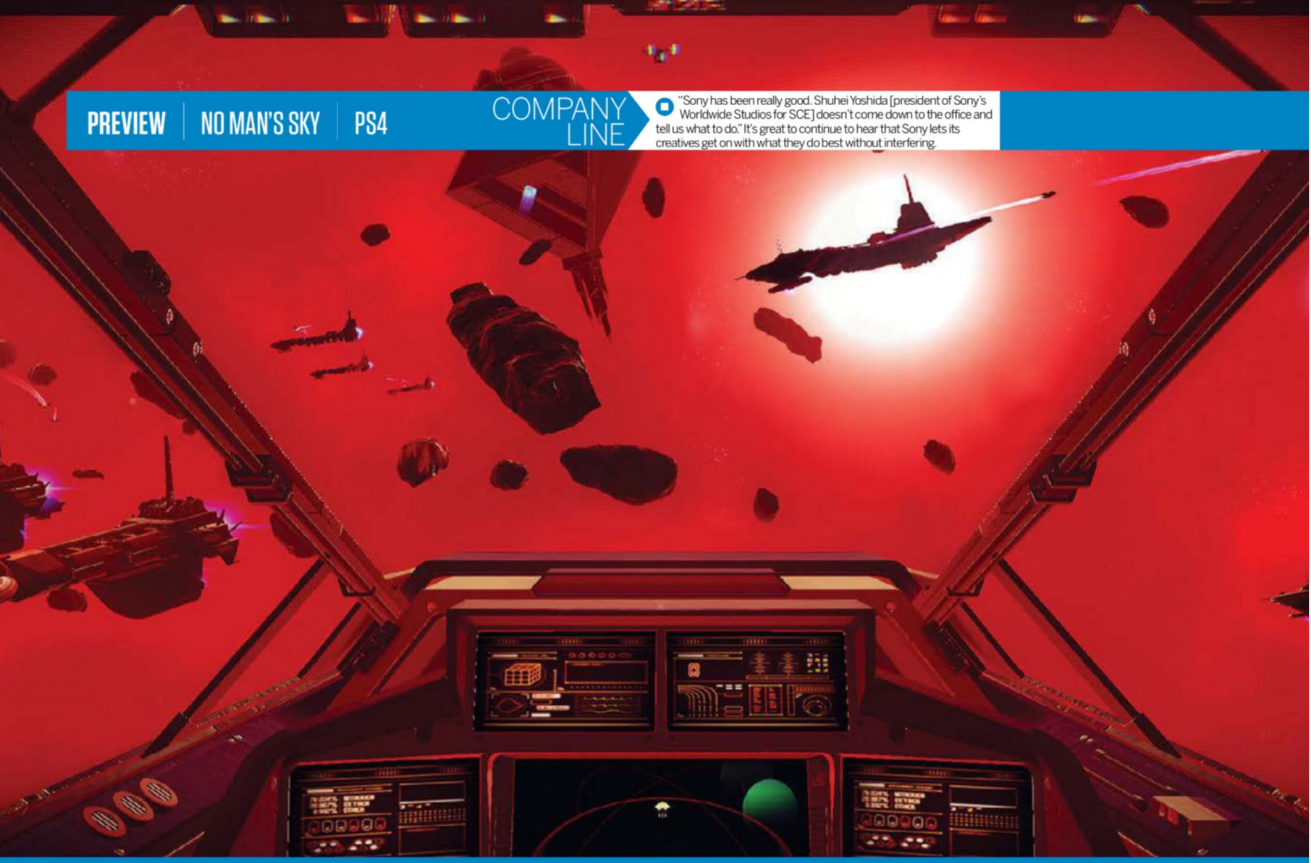
DARK SOULS



The influence of the *Souls* games is plain to see in *Salt And Sanctuary*, a 2D interpretation of FromSoftware's series.

COMPANY LINE

"Sony has been really good. Shuhei Yoshida [president of Sony's Worldwide Studios for SCE] doesn't come down to the office and tell us what to do." It's great to continue to hear that Sony lets its creatives get on with what they do best without interfering.



ETA 24 JUNE | **PUB** HELLO GAMES | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @HELLOGAMES

No Man's Sky

To seek out new life...

PS4

BY FAR THE most significant thing we found out courtesy of hands-on time with *No Man's Sky* is that the game will feature alien NPC characters that will require us to become a solo Captain Kirk, breaking down barriers on first contact as we try to build relationships, or, accidentally or otherwise, start a laser fight that pisses off an entire species. Sceptics have suggested that while this game might have 18 quintillion planets, it won't actually have anything of substance to do within it, so the fact that we now know there will be characters for us to talk to, battle and trade with is far from insignificant.

One of the most intriguing things about interacting with the four intelligent alien species in the game's universe is that on first contact, you're not going to have a clue what they're saying. You can change that by finding monoliths on planet surfaces as you explore the galaxy, which will result in you learning words that you can add to your vocabulary. Of course, when you only understand one or two words of an alien language, you're still going to have to make some guesses about what it is they are saying, hence why we referenced the possibility of accidentally pissing off an entire species in our opening. Every time you respond to an alien question, whether simply with a piece of dialogue, or an action like offering an item from your inventory, you're taking a gamble. That built-in potential for an interspecies misunderstanding can not only be tense, but it's a brilliant way of approaching the theme of cross-cultural interaction – which has long been a concern of the sci-fi genre – in the interactive way that only a videogame can.

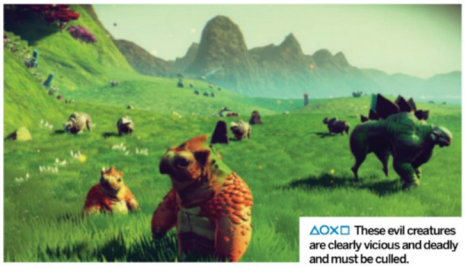
"BECOME A SOLO CAPTAIN KIRK, BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS ON FIRST CONTACT"

Like everything else in this game, these alien characters will be procedurally generated, meaning that each member of a species will be unique, from the features on their face, to their height, the way they are dressed, and even the sound of their voice (though they will share enough in common to be easily identified as members of a particular species). We're hoping this will be extended to their personalities, offering up variables when it comes to the approach you must take when dealing with them.

The inclusion of NPCs has the potential to bring a lot to the game outside of direct interactions with individual characters too. Some species are hostile to each other, opening up the possibility of some emergent situations that could place you in a difficult position when it comes to how you get involved when you come across some kind of interspecies ruckus, if at all. We're also hoping that there are some interesting histories behind



△○×□ That gigantic rock is one of the monoliths you have to find in order to learn alien languages.



△○×□ These evil creatures are clearly vicious and deadly and must be culled.





WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- △ Interact with four alien races, using dialogue options to build a relationship.
- □ Search for hidden monoliths to learn alien languages and become a polyglot.
- ✕ Turn it into *GTA: Space* by shooting everything and earning a wanted level.
- ○ Choose to become a pirate, trader, miner, or explorer and upgrade your gear.

HELLO GAMES ON...



THE END POINT

"I never know if it was a good thing or not to say you have to get to the centre of the universe, because it helps people to understand the game, but what I want to scream at people is you'll be able to play lots of different ways. When you pick up the controller, for a lot of people, they won't care about the centre." Sean Murray, managing director

PROCEDURAL AUDIO

"You want to get a sense of variety, but you don't want everything in between, because you want your separate categories, for places to sound different. It's like organised chaos. A lot of what we do is within these chaotic systems, but you can contain them and make them meaningful. That's what you want." Paul Weir, audio director

LETTING GO

"It's a balance between adding rules to procedural systems to try and influence the results, but if you do that too much, you end up taking away what makes it useful. I almost think of working with the procedural systems like working with a collaborator that is unpredictable and like a mad genius." Grant Duncan, art director/co-founder





each alien race and that learning their stories will offer a new way of adding some extra flavour to the game's universe.

Outside of what we've learned about the inclusion of alien NPCs in *No Man's Sky*, the biggest surprise from our time with the game is just how vital a part of the game survival is. Depending on how close or far away whatever planet you are exploring is from its sun, you may have to deal with extreme heat or cold that will test the capabilities of your suit's thermal protection. You might find that you need to blow a hole in a snowy landscape using your weapon to create a cave (yes, the landscape is that malleable) that will provide you shelter from the cold while your shield recharges. In the long term, though, you will want to search for resources that you can use to craft and trade in order to get better equipment that will help you more efficiently explore these hostile environments, as well as deal with attacks from aggressive creatures and survive raids from space pirates who will try and jack your ship's precious cargo when you're in transit.

Like many other people out there, we've always feared that *No Man's Sky* might be an impressive piece of technology that doesn't actually house a game that's any fun to play, but the more we discover about it –alien NPCs and survival elements included – the more that fear dissipates and the more excited we become.

Paul Walker-Emig

NO MAN'S SKY is being prepared for launch in the hangar at Hello Games. Navigate to the website for more details: **no-mans-sky.com**

IN THE ...MEANTIME

LIGHTNING RETURNS: FFXIII
Overlooked, due to its association with the unloved Final Fantasy *XIII*, *Lightning Returns* boasts a combat system not dissimilar to *FFXV*.

△○✕□ More than any of the core *Final Fantasy* games, *FFXV*'s combat feels like a hack-and-slash game, though there are still turn-based elements.



"WHAT WE HAVE HERE, POSSIBLY, IS A REFRESHING MISHMASH OF THE FAMILIAR AND THE TOTALLY STRANGE"

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Ambitious new art direction, combining real life with surreal fantasy.
- We feel like we've barely even scratched the surface of the combat system.
- Director Hajime Tabata has proven himself by directing *Crisis Core* and *Type-0*.
- A huge world, which can be traversed using vehicles and with barely any loading screens.

SHARE

SHARE THIS



THIS IS PLANET EARTH

It's all too beautiful

From its bustling cityscapes to its lush forests, *Final Fantasy XV* is teeming with gorgeous environments. Almost everything you see is worth saving and sharing. And for a game of its size and scope, it's amazing how much detail Square Enix has packed in – characters and enemies are all crisply rendered, and, for now at least, there are zero technical hiccups.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

ETA 30 SEPTEMBER | **PUB** SQUARE ENIX | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @FFXVEN

Final Fantasy XV

When the night has come, and the land is dark...

PS4

IT'S ALMOST 30 years since *Final Fantasy* first began – this is a series older than most of its players. So where can Square Enix go? After all this time, this build-up, all those worlds, characters and systems, what is there left to explore?

Looking at Eos, the in-game world that, more than any other of *Final Fantasy*'s landscapes resembles modern day Earth, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Square Enix was doing a Christopher Nolan, reining its characters and ideas in and making something 'grittier'. But that isn't the case. *FFXV*'s environments are definitely inspired by contemporary cities, places like Tokyo, Hong Kong and New York, but the game is still wildly expressionistic. In the latest, and perhaps final demo before the game's launch in September, you explore an ever-shifting dreamscape. One moment, you're in a forest – look up and you can see Leviathan gliding across the sky. Next, you're in a huge, grandiose dining room, dwarfed, like Jack at the top of the beanstalk, by its enormous furniture and features. Hit X and you transform into a pick-up truck, and can go driving around the floor. Later, you become a wild bear, and attack enemies by charging at them. Exactly how much of this abstraction, this surrealness, will be present in the full *FFXV* is unclear – the demo, after all is set completely inside a child's dream. But if Square is trying to offer us a taste of what's to come, its completed game will be a colourful mix of reality and the surreal. After decades of plunging into fictional universes, *Final Fantasy* is expanding its scope: what we have here, possibly, is a mashup of the familiar and the strange.

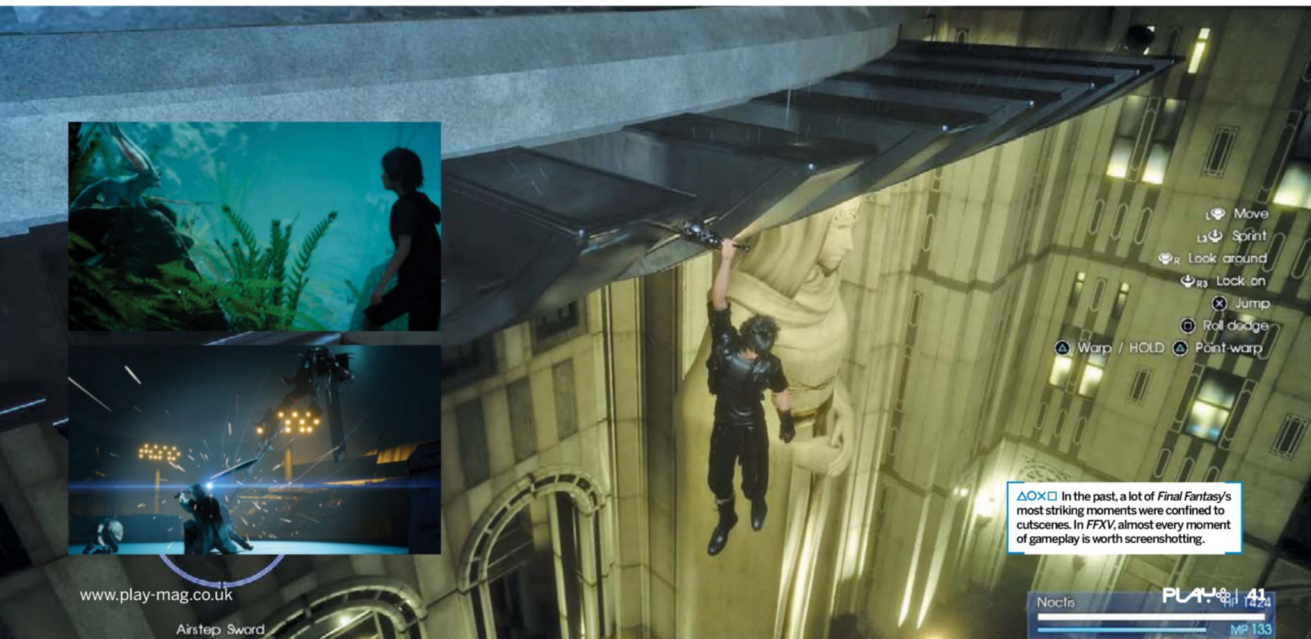
As for the nitty-gritty, the combat and menu systems, *FFXV*, is both stripped back and more complex. You're given four weapon slots and you switch between them using the directional buttons. Battles aren't random – like the enemies in online RPGs, *FFXV*'s monsters are triggered once you come within a certain range. Circle is your basic attack button, and the fights often feel like hacking and slashing: the influence of Tetsuya Nomura, one of *FFXV*'s directors and the creator of *Kingdom Hearts*, is heavily apparent. Nevertheless, fighting is still somewhat turn-based. You can dodge attacks but others are effectively unavoidable meaning you may just have to take the hit, lose some health then retreat until it's your 'turn' to once again go on the offensive. Rather than spamming one another with attacks, you and your opponent trade blows and parries back and forth, and victory is dependent more on your stats, level and HP management rather than your ability to press a few buttons.

Things get more complicated once you have party members. Directly, you only ever control Noctis and your teammates appear to be managed using a system similar to Gambits in *Final Fantasy XII* – you assign them abilities, and in battle, they use them at their own discretion. Their AI, however, reacts to certain events. If you're low on health, they will heal you. If an enemy is vulnerable from the back, they will try and flank it. You can also issue a few commands mid-battle and swap equipment at will. It's a mix of real-time and turn-based combat. Like its environments and aesthetic, *FFXV*'s mechanics are blend of different sensibilities.

And at the moment, it seems to be working. Compared to the impenetrable menus and upgrade systems of some other *Final Fantasy* games, *FFXV* feels accessible, and combat, rather than a computational slog, is urgent. The world, too, is filled with visual flair – the real-life influences only serve to exaggerate the colourful sights. Far from grounded, this is looking like one of the most ambitious *FF* games in years and, potentially, one of the best.

Ed Smith

FINAL FANTASY XV is polishing up its car-airship-thing over in the garage at Square Enix. Head over to the website for more: **finalfantasyxv.com**



△○×□ In the past, a lot of *Final Fantasy*'s most striking moments were confined to cutscenes. In *FFXV*, almost every moment of gameplay is worth screenshotting.

ETA Q1 2017 | **PUB** SEGA
DEV IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @SEGA_EUROPE

Yakuza 0

Becoming a made man

PS4

ALSO COMING TO PS3

THE PERENNIAL QUESTION for the *Yakuza* fan: 'Is it coming to Europe?' If you are one of those *Yakuza* devotees, quivering in anticipation, you can now rejoice, because Sega has spoken and the news is good. *Yakuza 0* is coming to PS4 and PS3 in Europe, even if we do have to wait until 2017.

Clearly, this is going to be of interest to hardcore *Yakuza* fans. However, as a prequel, set in Tokyo in 1988, the game also seems like an ideal way into the series for anyone who wants to see what all the fuss is about, but wants to jump in without the worry of all the narrative baggage that has been built up over the years.

Not that this should particularly concern you anyway. This is a game where you can be disco dancing and singing karaoke one minute, and then breaking limbs and wielding motorbikes above your head as a weapon the next – in other words, we don't think its particularly important to take the story all that seriously.

It is in those gargantuan tonal shifts – from the serious, to the brutally violent, to the hammy, to the silly – that we think much of the appeal of *Yakuza* lies and that's what makes us want to play *Yakuza 0*, rather than any deep interest in the origin story of protagonist Kazuma Kiryu.

Indeed, having played the demo of *Yakuza 0* when it was up on the Japanese PlayStation Store, that was precisely our experience. We didn't have a clue what anyone was saying, but we beat some dudes up via the game's satisfying combat system, did some karaoke and took in the sights, and that was enough to ensure that our ignorance of the Japanese tongue didn't matter. As far as we're concerned, getting to play the game in English is a bonus.

Paul Walker-Emig

YAKUZA 0 is being laundered by those lovely mobsters at Sega. Pop on an Eighties suit and check the website for more details: **Sega.co.uk**









△○✕□ If you've ever wondered why *Yakuza* sometimes gets compared to *Shenmue*, here's one answer.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

IN THE MEANTIME...

YAKUZA 5 After its PS3 release in December 2015, *Yakuza 5* is your obvious go-to while you're waiting for *Yakuza 0*.

"YOU CAN BE DISCO DANCING AND SINGING KARAOKE ONE MINUTE, AND THEN BREAKING LIMBS AND WIELDING A MOTORBIKE ABOVE YOUR HEAD AS A WEAPON THE NEXT"

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- This will provide something to scratch that *Shenmue* itch you may have.
- The *Yakuza* series is lauded for its mini-games, so expect plenty to do.
- We get to explore a glorious fictionalised version of Eighties Kabukicho, named 'Kamurocho'.
- It has reviewed well in the east, so we already know that it's a good game.





△○×□ This is how Sega should have announced that *Yakuza 0* is coming to Europe next year...

ANATOMY OF... PAUL PHOENIX

The man with the greatest high-rise hairdo in the history of videogames is taking another shot at winning the King Of Iron First Tournament in Tekken 7. Will he succeed or is his ego as big as his haircut?



BURNING RAGE

Tekken 7 will introduce Rage Arts. After dropping down into critical health and entering Rage, you can then use your fury to pull off a powerful attack, similar to a Super in the *Street Fighter* series, which is called a Rage Art. Paul's Rage Art starts with a Hammer Punch, setting the opponent up for a powerful version of his iconic Burning Fist attack.

BEAR HATER

Paul's goal in entering the King Of Iron Fist Tournament is to prove himself as the toughest guy in the universe. In trying to earn that title, he found himself engaged in a feud with the bear Kuma and has clashed with him repeatedly. Paul can be a bit of a buffoon: at the end of *Tekken 3*, he walked away, thinking he'd won the tournament, not realising that he still had a foe to fight.

HEAVY HITTER

Paul might just be your best option when jumping in to *Tekken 7* as a beginner, being as he has traditionally been one of the easier characters to use. You can find plenty of characters in the *Tekken* roster with more damaging combos, but his hard-hitting normal attacks mean that's not really an issue, particularly when pulling off technically demanding combos is a bit beyond you. Just be wary that it is easy to sidestep his attacks.

FAMILY FEUDS

Like every character in *Tekken*, Paul's story will be in part defined by the backdrop of the Mishima Clan feud (they've been kicking the crap out of each other ever since the first *Tekken*). However, *Tekken* producer Katsuhiro Harada has said that the Mishima Clan's story is going to come to an end, bringing the conflict between Heihachi, Kazuya and Jin to an end.

ETA TBC | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @BANDAINAMCOUK

Tekken 7 PS4

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"IT'S KIND OF LIKE BATTLE ROYALE WITH DINOSAURS AND WEAPON CRAFTING"

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- The game's map is 48 square kilometres in size. In other words, it's pretty big.
- Dinosaurs can be trained to perform a particular role, such as defending a base.
- There are 60 types of dinosaurs to tame in the game, along with other extinct species.
- PlayStation VR support is planned, offering the ultimate in immersion.

△○✕□ Working with other people is vital when you're fighting something that can bite your head off in a second.

MINECRAFT If you're after something that offers the kind of exploration and crafting mechanics you're looking forward to in *Ark*, *Minecraft* is the only choice.







ETA JUNE | **PUB** STUDIO WILDCARD | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @SURVIVETHEARK

Ark: Survival Evolved

I AM A STEGOSAURUS

PS4

THERE HAVE BEEN a few significant changes when it comes to *Ark: Survival Evolved* that leave us unsure of exactly what we should expect of the full release of the game when it hits PS4 in the summer.

The first point of confusion relates to *Ark: Survival Of The Fittest*, a spin-off recently announced by developer Studio Wildcard. This separate free-to-play title is a tournament-style game that sidelines the focus the main game has on exploration and ramps up the speed of building, crafting and dinosaur taming to create a faster-paced, round-based mode that is all about fighting to the death. It's kind of like *Battle Royale* with dinosaurs and weapon crafting.

It isn't yet clear, however, whether this version of the game is coming to PS4. If it's not, it won't be the end of the world because we will be getting what Studio Wildcard promised to deliver in the first place: an MMO survival game that blends elements from titles like *Rust* and *Minecraft* in a land populated by dinosaurs that can be corralled into your collaboratively-built settlements, tamed and even ridden.

Having said that, the more competitively-focussed *Survival Of The Fittest* sounds like a really fun way to experience *Ark* and, by extension, a great way of bringing new players into the game *and* maintaining a strong player base. The importance of that shouldn't be underrated given that this is a genre that has been very PC-focussed in the past. In that sense, even though we're still getting the game originally promised by the developer, we may feel like we're missing out a little if we don't get *Survival Of The Fittest* along with the standard game.

Another announcement that we're waiting to hear more on the status of is a split-screen mode that hasn't yet been confirmed for PS4. We see no reason why it won't be included in the PS4 version, but it would be nice to know for sure. Given that you can build together collaboratively in this game, local split-screen seems like a great way of experiencing it. You often face a steep learning curve with titles like this where the possibilities on hand and the intricacies of all the systems aren't immediately apparent to you – playing in split-screen with a friend would make that matter less and make easing into Ark's world a whole lot easier. We've seen split-screen work similarly for titles like *Minecraft*, so we're convinced it would work here too.

Speaking of working, there have been some technical issues with *Ark* during its time in Early Access. That's to be expected, because ironing out these kinds of issues is exactly what Early Access is all about. Still, whether or not all these problems will be sorted out by release adds to the questions we have surrounding the game.

We hope we get the answers we'd like when the game finally comes out, because without *Rust* and with the PS4 release of *DayZ* seemingly permanently pending, there's a gap for a title like this on PS4. We'd also just really like to smash into someone else's compound while riding a triceratops and then crush them beneath those gigantic dinosaur feet, because that's just the kind of people we are.

Paul Walker-Emig

ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED is being hatched in the labs at Wildcard Studios. Check the website for more details: **playark.com**







PRIOR FORM

J-STARS VICTORY VS+ Another fighting game riddled with Japanese licences, *J-Stars* did actually include some *One Piece* characters. A dry run for *Burning Blood*, no doubt.

ETA 3 JUNE | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO | **DEV** SPIKE CHUNSOFT | **TWITTER** @SPIKECHUNSOFT_E

One Piece: Burning Blood

Because who doesn't want Monkey D. Luffy on their Vita?

PS4

ALSO COMING TO VITA

THE WORLD OF *One Piece* has its fair share of fighting going on at pretty much any and all times, yet this is the first time we're seeing a proper *One Piece* fighting game. Odd that it's taken so long, but not something to dwell on: *Burning Blood*'s creators at Spike Chunsoft and Bandai Namco have listened to the fans. The fans wanted fighting and guess what the fans get? A turn-based walking simulator! Oh, no, wait – a fighting game. That's the one.

Burning Blood can be a one-on-one brawler, or it can go up to a three-on-three tag battle that takes minutes to fight all the way through. This brings with it a level of strategy that changes depending on a situation. Fewer fighters means the need to take advantage of your specials, blocks, dodges and all the good, proper fighting game stuff Spike Chunsoft has in there. More fighters, however, means it's about those moves mixed with careful, tactical switching in and out between your other team members.

All this nattering of it being a fighting game and special moves and dodging and blah-de-blah might have members of the *One Piece* fan base who *aren't* members of the fighting game community a bit worried. Will you be able to play *Burning Blood*? Of course you will – you're still a part of the target audience, as Hiroyuki Kaneko, the game's director, tells us. "There are several key elements that mean even casual fans can play the game," he explains. "Something I think fans will especially like are the special attacks, which are exactly like they are in the comics.

"Another point that helps people get into the fighting game genre is auto-guard – you can block attacks without having to press a button. And there's automatic combo support, so you don't have to discover all of the combos for yourself. These are things that help the really casual players get into fighting games, we think."

> "IF YOU CONSIDER THE COMICS THEN OF COURSE SOME CHARACTERS ARE VERY STRONG AND SOME AREN'T VERY GOOD AT FIGHTING"

Keeping things accurate to the world of *One Piece* is, of course, a big thing in *Burning Blood* – you can't have angry anime/manga fans breathing down your neck, it doesn't make for good business. But with that accuracy comes the fact that, well, some people in the game are a bit rubbish at the whole fighting thing. Koji Nakajima, *Burning Blood*'s producer, has this snippet for those of you worried about this particular element: "If you consider the original comics then of course some characters are very strong and some aren't very good at fighting, so for certain attacks, yes, there are better skills.

"But when it comes back to the original parameters, most of the characters would be the same. It's just skill is quite different – one character in the game isn't super strong, but he can shoot from long distance. If you know how to move well with this character, you're able to defeat powerful enemies, so again the balance is there."

The thing that caught our eye the most with *Burning Blood*, though, is Paramount mode – aka story mode to you and us. This will focus on one particular episode in *One Piece*'s history, the Marineford, allowing you to play through the ups and downs of that particular bit of familiar story. And if it's successful enough, Spike might well make one or two more extra episodes, Nakajima told us.

There you have it – *One Piece: Burning Blood*. A three-versus-three brawler aiming to cater for hardcore fans, as well as those who just know the source material. Will it succeed? Well, it'll have fans. That's all we're saying for now.

Ian Dransfield

ONE PIECE: BURNING BLOOD is hoisting its colours on the good ship Spike Chunsoft. Set a course for **onepiece-game.com** for more details.





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WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

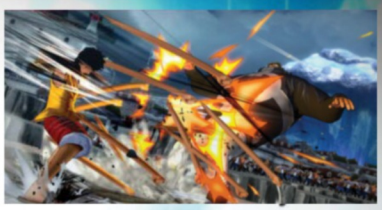
△ Even if you've never played a game, you'll be able to fight quite well.

□ But if you know what you're doing, there's enough to keep your brain happy for a bit.

✕ It's faithful to the anime/manga, allowing you to live out your piratical fantasies.

○ One dude turns into a gold dude and smashes other dudes and dudettes up, which is hilarious.

△○✕□ Fights are lengthy affairs, with three whole energy bars needing to be depleted before victory is declared.



Instant Expert

ETA Q4 2016 | **PUB** NINJA THEORY | **DEV** IN-HOUSE

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice

PS4

IT'S EVER-CHANGING

The fact that *Hellblade*'s name was recently changed, gaining the *Senua's Sacrifice* subtitle, is a reflection of the approach Ninja Theory is taking to this game in general. The studio announced it earlier than it normally would have in order to develop the game in an open progress with its community as it makes changes, whether that be to the story, combat systems or indeed the game's name.

SENUA IS PSYCHOTIC

The reality that we see from Senua's perspective is a blend of the real world and manifestations that emerge from her psychosis. We've seen scenes where she is haunted by voices poking at her fears and insecurities. Psychosis isn't something that's normally dealt with in a realistic way in videogames, but we get the sense that *Hellblade* taking a more considered approach to the issue.

NINJA THEORY HAS TALENT

If there's one thing that guarantees our interest in *Hellblade*, it's that we know Ninja Theory is a studio with talent. It proved that with *DmC*, a game that demonstrates that it can create a satisfying combat system. That's important, given that combat will be a big part of *Hellblade*. What *DmC* also showcased, however, was Ninja Theory's creativity – we think of the Bob Barbas boss fight in particular.

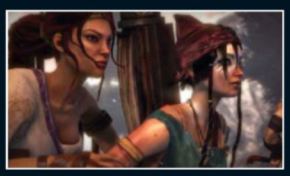
IT'S INSPIRED BY STREET FIGHTER

When it comes to combat, *Hellblade* takes inspiration from fighters such as *Street Fighter*. That means you're given a set of moves to experiment with from the start, rather than a growing arsenal that you add to over the course of the game. It's a system that favours skill and a desire to make every fight feel like a conflict that matters, rather than throwing a load of meaningless encounters your way.

MO-CAP IS AMAZING

Given that *Hellblade* is being made by a relatively small team (Ninja Theory has suggested it's around 15 people), it's incredible how good it looks. Particularly impressive is the quality of the performance capture. Ninja Theory says the reason it is aiming so high with its performance capture is that it is important to the team to portray the physical and mental trials that Senua is going through.

THE EVOLUTION OF NINJA THEORY



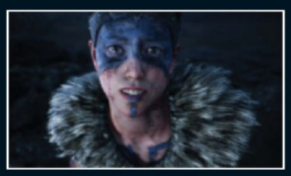
It may have been average, but the studio's debut game (as Ninja Theory, not Just Add Monsters) did at least show the technical skill of the studio – you couldn't accuse *Heavenly Sword* of looking bad at the time.



Its second game, *Enslaved*, was far better and shows signs of some of the strengths that we are likely to see in *Hellblade* – we are thinking of the game's animation and performance capture that is impressive, even today.



If there's one thing we'd pick out when it comes to *DmC Devil May Cry*, it's the creativity shown off in levels that would warp under the influence of demonic forces, making the environments feel alive.



Given that Senua suffers from psychosis, we expect to see more of that creative design in *Hellblade*. What we've seen suggests that the studio's skill with performance capture is also being put to good use.

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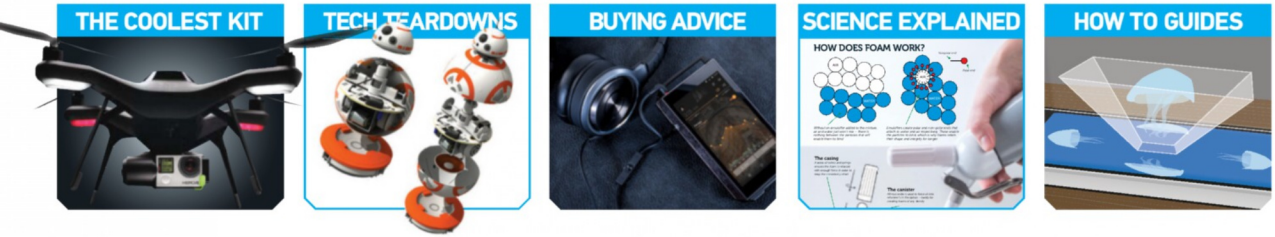


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PREVIEW

A quick look at some of the other awesome games that are just around the corner

1 GRAND KINGDOM

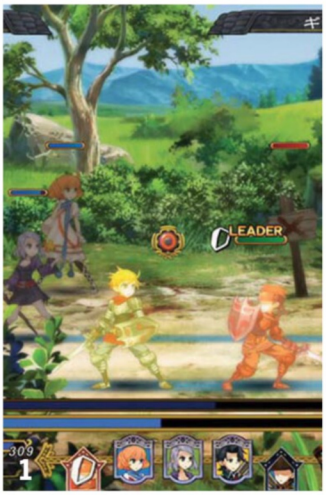
FORMAT: PS4, VITA
RELEASE DATE: 21 JUNE

EVOCATIVE OF THE *Disgaea* series, *Grand Kingdom* is an RPG from a Japanese studio that has a heavy tactical focus. This means turn-based battles, a number of different combat classes and a battle system where positioning is just as important as the attacks you decide to use. In terms of its setting, *Grand Kingdom* broadly takes the medieval period as its inspiration, but a strong fantasy element and a colourful art style means it's a little more vibrant and crazy than you might expect from a game inspired by that period. We think that the game looks practically born to be played on the Vita (keep the dream alive!), though it's also coming to PS4 if you'd rather play at home.

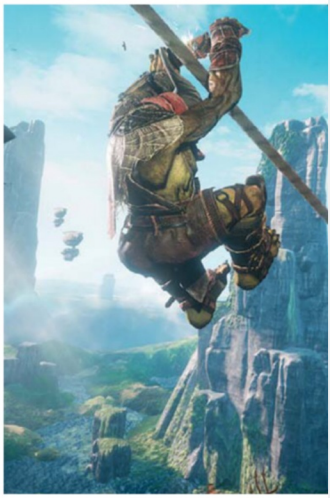
2 GANG BEASTS

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2016

WE GET THE impression that *Gang Beasts* has greatly grown in ambition since its development started as a result of the insanely positive reception the game received when it was in alpha state. That's why it has been in development for so long and that's why the developer has announced that *Gang Beasts* will support online play and PlayStation VR. Online is a great addition, but it is still during local multiplayer – where you can see and hear other people reacting to those crazy, unpredictable, four-player, Royal Rumble-style fistfights – that the game is at its best. As for the VR presentation, we're expecting it to be like a diorama rather than using a first-person viewpoint.









3 LEGO STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

FORMAT: PS4, VITA
RELEASE DATE: 28 JUNE

OF COURSE THERE'S a *Lego Star Wars* game arriving in the wake of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Still, its predictability doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad thing. More worrying on that front is the inconsistency in the quality of recent *Lego* games that makes this entry less of a guaranteed hit than it would have perhaps been in the past – the likes of *Lego Batman* and even *Dimensions* weren't up to scratch. At its best, though, TT Games has shown that it is great at showing love for a game's source material while simultaneously poking fun at it. Hopefully, we'll see TT back on form with this interpretation of the film, which we were big fans of.

4 MOTHER RUSSIA BLEEDS

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2016

IF VIDEOGAMING HAS an equivalent genre to exploitation cinema, then surely *Mother Russia Bleeds* falls within it. With its brutally over-the-top violence and Eighties-inspired visuals, the game looks as if Quentin Tarantino directed *Drive* and then some diehard fan of *Hotline Miami* decided to make a videogame based on it. In gameplay terms, the aim of developer The Cartel is to create something reminiscent of beat-'em-up classics like *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage*. If it can succeed in that goal, then *Mother Russia Bleeds* should be a lot of fun. We certainly can't wait to partake in the bloody carnage.





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ROUNDUP











5 ZERO TIME DILEMMA

FORMAT: VITA
RELEASE DATE: 29 JUNE

THE FOLLOW UP to *Virtue's Last Reward* and *Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors – Zero Time Dilemma* – is another tale about a group of kidnapped individuals placed in a number of escape-the-room scenarios that they have to solve in order to survive. The twist this time is that after each scenario, every character is injected with a drug that makes them forget what has just transpired. A major change in this entry is that it will drop the visual novel prose in favour of fully-voiced characters. Expect betrayals, tough choices and plenty of surprises – kind of like a *Saw* movie but with better writing.

6 SONG OF THE DEEP

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2016

THE TEAM AT Insomniac isn't just working on *Ratchet & Clank* – it is also going to be sending *Song Of The Deep* our way. The game is an action-adventure in the Metroidvania mold. It looks like you spend the majority of your time in a submarine that you can upgrade with new abilities. Insomniac has built its name on offering inventive weapons and upgrades to play with – being able to catch a torpedo with a claw arm is one example Insomniac has given for *Song Of The Deep* – so we're excited to see what it can pull off underwater. We've also seen sections where you get out of the sub and swim around as protagonist Merryn as part of her quest to find her missing father.

7 SKYLAR & PLUX: ADVENTURE ON CLOVER ISLAND

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2016

YOU WAIT ALL this time for the return of 3D platformers and they all come along at once! As well as *Ratchet & Clank*, we've got *Yooka-Laylee* and now *Skylar & Plux* coming to PS4. Citing the likes of *Crash Bandicoot* and the *Jak & Daxter* series as inspirations (the influences of the latter are particularly apparent), the game is bursting with colour, humour and, we hope, lots of fun. Can it compete with the aforementioned *Ratchet & Clank*, though? We will have to wait until we can play it in order to make that particular judgement.

8 STYX: SHARDS OF DARKNESS

FORMAT: PS4
RELEASE DATE: Q3 2016

IN TRUTH, THE first *Styx* game was pretty average – to put it kindly – but we're hoping that developer Cyanide Studios can take what it has learned from the first game and deliver a more compelling stealth-action game at the second time of asking. That's what the studio is promising, saying that it has a bigger budget, bigger ideas and a new engine. Early screens also suggest that it has some more diversity and colour when it comes to its environments, too. Cyanide has had recent success with *Blood Bowl II*, so we're hoping that inventiveness carries on through to *Shards Of Darkness*, too.

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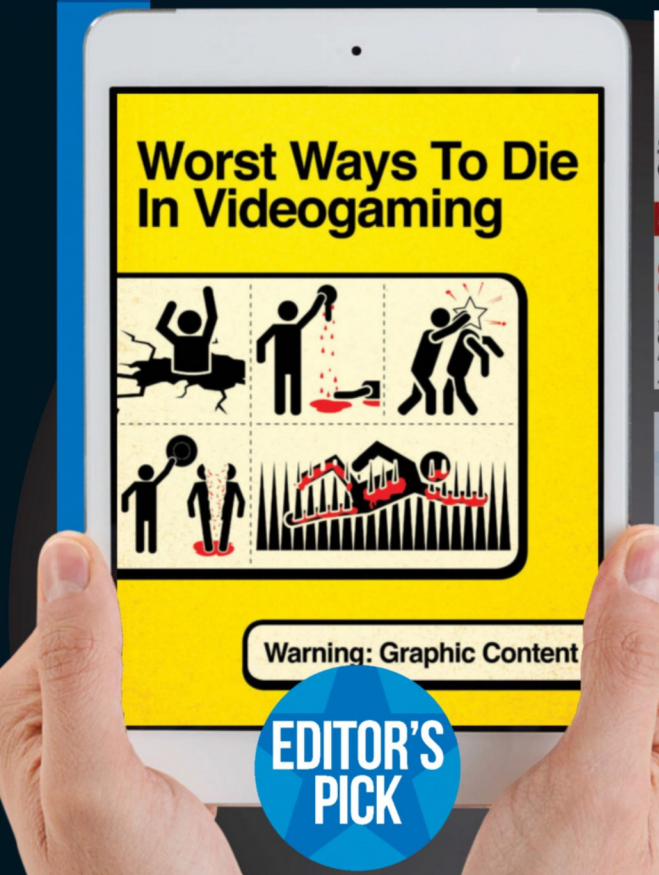




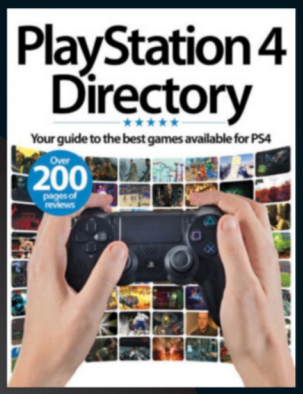


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"WHY ARE PEOPLE SO DOWN ON INDIE GAMES?"

EVERY TIME A new Plus selection is announced, history repeats itself. Comments sections get clogged up with misinformation and entitlement, rabid and unfounded hatred of anything that doesn't come from a major publisher searing my eyes and hurting my soul. There are so many factors going on in deciding on these gifted games that we'll never be privy to, but that doesn't mean you can't simply use a little common sense to see why the state of play is the way it is right now.

For one thing, Sony simply doesn't *need* to be delivering big-name games – Xbox One is playing catch-up and giving away relatively recent retail releases like *Sunset Overdrive* is an act of desperation, not something we should see as a false standard. There's no way Microsoft would be handing out big first-party titles if the tables were turned. You don't need to sprint when you're already in the lead, after all.

That said, Microsoft's approach to backward compatibility is clearly helping its Games With Gold lineups to be relevant and interesting to the entire Xbox One player base, whereas you miss out on a fair bit of Plus goodness if you don't own all three consoles. I fully expect this to change as PS Now – Sony's solution to the back-compatibility issue – grows and evolves, and I can well imagine PS Now rentals could join and eventually even replace the current system. When many players probably don't have a good enough connection to get the most out of Now, it's no less exclusionary than spreading the games across three platforms, but it's likely the way things will go as digital infrastructures continue to improve over the next few years.



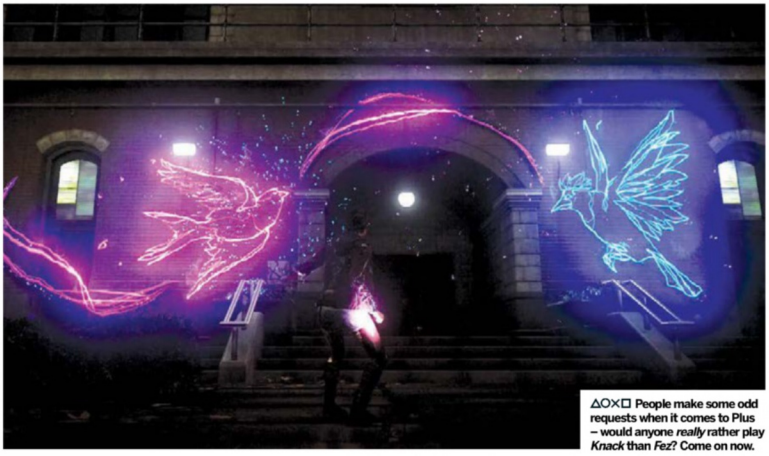




There's also the matter of publisher relations to consider, as giving away a big third-party game when it could still be making decent money for them isn't going to happen without serious remuneration. When numbers and prices plateau (as is only really starting to happen with the earliest PS4 games now), it becomes much more likely, so perhaps we *are* on the verge of Plus offering more high-profile PS4 titles. Even then, people will find something to complain about, whether it's the fact that they already bought *Second Son* at launch or that they get the wrong *Assassin's Creed* game.

No matter how good the games offered on PS Plus are, people will still find something to moan about, although the common complaint is the one that winds me up the most: "less indies". What does it matter where a game comes from, how many people made it or how much it cost to produce if it turns out to be good? Erecting a wall between indie games and 'proper' games is such an archaic way of looking at things and one that does a disservice to creators. Think back to your highlights of the Plus selections over the last few years and it's likely that indie titles will rank among the highlights, and that's not just because of a lack of big games to give them competition – it speaks instead of their quality. Games like *Rocket League*, *Rogue Legacy*, *The Binding Of Isaac*, *Fez*... there's a reason they get the same scores at review as big boys like *COD*.

So by all means bitch about an actual weak selection when they come up, but please, do your homework first. Indies are games too...



△○×□ People make some odd requests when it comes to Plus – would anyone *really* rather play *Knack* than *Fez*? Come on now.



JON GORDON
EDITOR, GAMES™

"MICROSOFT IS DOING IT BETTER RIGHT NOW"

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OF ALL THE fronts upon which the console war between PS4 and Xbox One would be waged, how Sony and Microsoft give away games as part of their respective subscription services isn't the one that's likely making up anyone's mind, but it's not a small detail. Sony really upped the ante of what a subscription service on a home console should be with PlayStation Plus and Microsoft responded forcefully to make Xbox Live Gold something more than a key to great online connectivity.

For my money, Xbox Live Gold and its Games With Gold lineup more consistently offers good value, but it's been close in the last couple of years. PS Plus has managed to pull out some real gems in the last year, in no small part thanks to a better pool of indie titles such as *Rocket League* and *Transistor*, to name a couple, but Xbox One has fired back hard with *Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition* timed nicely for the launch of *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* and even massive open-world titles like *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Month-on-month, Xbox consistently offers a greater money value for its games than PlayStation does.



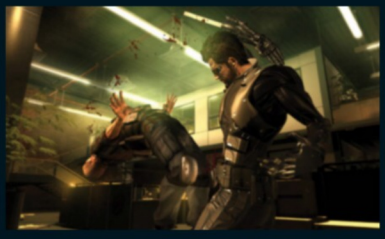


△○×□ The only thing that Xbox Live's Games With Gold has lacked is a breakout hit on the scale of *Rocket League*, but month after month it more regularly offers a higher value of games.



Of course, the complaint could fairly be made that a lot of Games With Gold titles are things most of us have already played and back in the day, when it was all Xbox 360-focused, it was a big problem I had with the service. So many years of games and only old ones being given away. Microsoft had a real issue capturing more recent titles and sometimes that's true on Xbox One too.

But all of that has changed since backwards compatibility became one of the console's few trump cards against PS4. Sony has had cross-buy titles that work on PS Vita, but that's really nothing compared to being able to play the likes of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, *Gears Of War 2*, *Borderlands*, *Dead Space* and *Saints Row IV* on the Xbox One. Sure, it's those old games again, but now with a generation between them, they carry a nostalgic weight and many of these are games you might not have had a chance to play first time around (a couple are ones I missed out on). In many instances, backwards compatibility means that Xbox Live Gold subscribers are receiving four games every month as opposed to only two on PlayStation Plus, on top of a number of rotating discount deals.



Both PS Plus and Games With Gold have their good and bad months, but the odds are always in Xbox One's favour when some classic 360 games become available on the service and increase the chance that the monthly fee will pay off with nostalgic gaming time. For that reason alone, it's forced its way back to being the better subscription service.

Which rather places the spotlight back on Sony and its lack of backwards compatibility. At this point in the generation, it's hardly going to make much difference to whether or not you would want a PS4 in the first place, but being able to grab classic games you might have missed on a regular basis would certainly make PS Plus subscribers on PS4 feel a lot better about the whole situation.

HOW TO SURVIVE DARK SOULS III

Even if you're a veteran player, FromSoftware's new action-RPG is hard as nails. Victory is within your grasp though, and your best bet is paying close attention to this guide

What does it take to survive your first journey to Lothric? Courage, perseverance and patience are the obvious answers, but sometimes it helps to have a little bit of advice to ride on when embarking on a mad jaunt through a FromSoftware RPG. Collectively, we chalked up around 100 hours of *Dark Souls III* before the game launched, so take it from us that we know our stuff. The next few pages have been written to guide you through your treacherous quest.

However, if you're new to the *Souls* franchise, then it's worth pointing out that the best way to enjoy *Dark Souls* is to fully experience it for yourself – this means no walkthroughs, no wikis. It also means that you *will* die again and again. This guide highlights how we recommend you tackle the game the first time around in order to both enjoy its trademark difficulty and best it. These are by no means the only things you need to pay attention to, but keep the following in mind and you might just achieve victory, if you have the stones...

CHOOSE



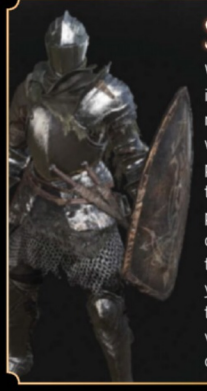
STR (MELEE)

A Strength build is primarily for those of you that like to use greatswords, big axes and hammers, but STR also boosts resistances (fire in particular) and governs unarmed attacks if you're someone who gets a bit punchy. This is often the most fun route to take, as a lot of the most brutal weapons scale with Strength and require a high base stat. Bear in mind here, though, that a lot of heavy weapons chew through Stamina, which can leave you vulnerable, so be sure to pump plenty of souls into END and VIT to help you survive fast-paced encounters.



DEX (MELEE)

If you fancy yourself as a ninja then Dexterity is the path you should choose early on. DEX enables you to wield more technical weapons (katanas, thrusting swords, spears) and also lowers the damage you take from falling, which can be helpful. DEX weapons tend to be faster but not as robust or powerful as STR weapons and don't stagger nearly as often, so be careful. Rapiers have traditionally been pretty OP in *Dark Souls*, so consider grabbing this from by the Winged Knight in High Wall Of Lothric and upgrading it. Failing that, a katana is always a solid choice for a DEX build.

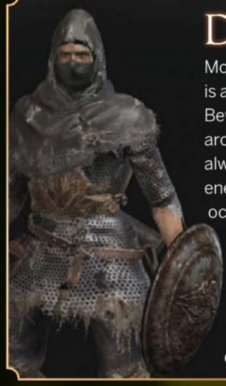


STR/DEX (MELEE)

Working with a combination of STR and DEX is for more advanced players who want to make use of a lot of the transposed boss soul weapons that feature in the game. During our playthroughs, we found that an awful lot of these special weapons – the greatswords in particular – had high DEX requirements, as did the Black Knight Sword that we finished the game with. It's also worth considering if you're the kind of adventurer who doesn't like to stick to a single weapon type, as it offers the versatility of stats you'll need in order to try out more or less any melee weapon you find.

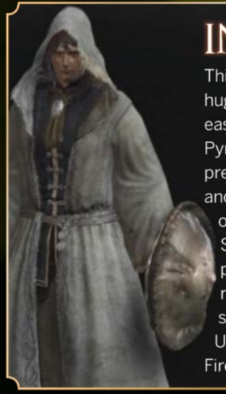
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YOUR BUILD



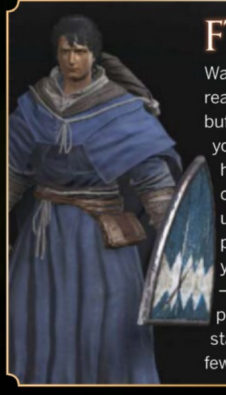
DEX (RANGED)

More so than in any other *Souls* game, archery is actually a legitimate option in *Dark Souls III*. Beware, though, as you won't be running around like Legolas straight away. We've always found bows to be best for drawing enemies out (or cheesing tough enemies on occasion) but have never favoured them as a primary weapon, as it involves changing how you play the game significantly. It's also worth noting that this isn't the best build to start off with, since decent arrows don't come cheap and the special variants don't unlock in the shop for quite a while.



INT (SORCERIES)

This has always been the favoured path of a huge amount of players as, traditionally, it's easier than getting up close and personal. Pyromancy works differently in *DSIII* to previous games, now scaling with both INT and FTH to make it viable for both schools of casting. Sorceries, meanwhile, like Soul Spear and Homing Crystal Soulmass are powerful with high INT, so if casting sounds right for you, you'll need a catalyst and then speak to the pilgrim on the bridge before Undead Settlement. He'll then appear in Firelink Shrine and will sell you spells.



FTH (MIRACLES)

Walking the path of a Cleric can be really, really tough, as a lot of miracles are based on buffs rather than actual attacks. Make sure you're carrying some sort of weapon with high damage like a mace, as at close range only Miracles like Wrath Of The Gods are useful. However, using Lightning Spears is pretty badass and there's nothing to stop you putting points into STR as a backup – it might not be quite the game-breaking powerhouse it was previously but the Cleric's starting mace can still ruin enemies after a few stat and weapon upgrades.



PLAY RECOMMENDS – STR

At the end of the day, there's technically no right or wrong way to approach building a character in *Dark Souls III*, but you can seriously screw yourself over if you pump souls into the wrong stats or purchases. Historically, INT builds have been the easiest way to beat a *Dark Souls* game. What we will say is even if Sorcery or Pyromancy builds spell an easy path through the game, you won't ever get to experience the game in the best way – that is, toe-to-toe with everything Lothric throws at you, blade in hand.

If you start as a Warrior, you begin the game with super-high STR, good armour (the Northern set) and a weapon that can legitimately compete all the way to the end of *Dark Souls III* in the trusty battle axe. As soon as you possibly can, talk with the Crestfallen Warrior in Firelink Shrine (the dude who, understandably, looks and sounds upset) and follow his little quest line. Before long, you'll be given a Heavy Gem. Grab the Farron Coal from Farron's Keep and give it to Andre the blacksmith to be able to infuse your battle axe (or the equally good bastard sword, which you can buy for 3,000 souls early on and use until the end of the game) with the Heavy property. This removes all other scaling other than STR, which is boosted considerably, in turn making your life easier, as you can spend the rest of your playthrough without having to invest in DEX to maximise damage output.

OUR BUILD

We finished Dark Souls III before launch, thanks in part to our cracking array of gear. Beware: spoilers!



BLACK KNIGHT SWORD
Finding this one was fun. In Smouldering Lake, allow the ballista to destroy the floor near a big tree, drop down and then hit every wall you see until you find an illusory one. It's behind there. Great damage output, and there's an abundance of Twinkling Titanite to upgrade it with.

BLACK KNIGHT HELM
Looted from a Black Knight in Untended Graves, an area hidden behind an illusory wall in the Consumed King's Garden. Good fire resistance and physical damage reduction.

SILVER KNIGHT ARMOUR
Dropped from a Silver Knight in a spoiler-heavy area after the Pontiff Sulyvahn boss fight in Irithyll Of The Boreal Valley. Great lightning resistance.

FALLEN KNIGHT GAUNTLETS AND LEGGINGS
Both part of a full set found early in the game. Great physical damage reduction and legitimately good enough overall to use for the whole run, if you so choose.

ESSENTIALS



HAVEL'S RING

Crafted from the soul of the stray demon found on the broken bridge above Farron's Keep. Grab this as early as possible, as it ups your maximum equipment load significantly, meaning you can wear all the lovely heavy armour you've found and still have a fast roll.

DRAGON CREST SHIELD

Also on the bridge above the swamp at Farron's Keep. This shield boasts nearly 90 per cent fire damage reduction, which is crucial in *Dark Souls III* as an awful lot of enemies have buffed fire attacks.



CHLORANTHY RING

Drop off the lift near the top of the tower with the giant on it in Undead Settlement, fight the stray demon (or run right past it) and go through the buildings until you reach the rooftops. From here, drop onto a ledge on the large temple with the Curse-Rotted Greatwood in it and drop down through the tower to find the ring. Boosts Stamina recovery rate considerably. Saves lives.

FIVE THINGS TO PACK

There's a multitude of different consumables to help you on your way. Here are the ones an unkindled should never leave the house without

ESTUS FLASK

This should be fairly obvious, but you need these to heal, so don't forget to have them equipped (unless you're doing a no-heal run like a nutter).

EMBER

These little babies cause you to glow like a badass and also boost your max health considerably. Keep a few to hand in case you come up against a troublesome boss fight.

GREEN BLOSSOM

These are little bits of lettuce or cabbage or something that increase Stamina recovery. Given that Stamina is utterly essential, keep a few of these on you for bosses.

KNIVES

Or whichever thrown weapon scales best for your build, really – all of the available options are great for both inflicting extra damage and drawing enemies out from a crowd.

RESIN

All of the Resin types add solid damage, other than Poison and Bleed as they're a bit rubbish. These items buff your right-hand weapon and are extremely effective.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Eight handy hints that should help you hang onto your hard-earned souls as you tackle the horrors of Lothric

DON'T BE GREEDY



Greed is the main cause of death in *Dark Souls*. Fact. When you see an enemy's HP dwindling, always be wary of running in for the kill if you aren't prepared to face the potential consequences. Over-confidence is a bitch and can mean a short, sharp trip back to the bonfire, so take your time, wait for an opening and pick your strikes.

KEEP 'EM PEELED



All too often we've been snuck up on by some have-a-go hero; don't make the same mistake. Every time you open a chest, go through a door or anything else that requires you turning your back, bear in mind that there is always something in the shadows. Use the right stick and keep the camera facing backwards if you're indisposed.

TRUST NOTHING



Mimics have returned in full force in *Dark Souls III*. Veteran players will know, but if you're new, *hit every single chest before you open it*. Mimics are creatures that look like treasure chests except they have a lot of sharp teeth. You can never be too careful – always check before opening, as these guys are abundant and deadly.

PATIENCE IS KEY



There's no getting away from it: this is a hard game. Take your time, learn how enemies work and – most of all – be patient. There's no reason for you to rush unless you're feeling completely overwhelmed, and these games reward players who are willing to spend time learning patterns, working on their rolls and generally being sensible.

BEWARE OF FIRE



The theme that runs throughout *Dark Souls III* is that of flame and cinder. As such, there are an enormous amount of enemies that will dish out fire damage throughout (especially in boss fights) so make sure you're prepared. Always pay attention to the resistances afforded to you by armour, and be sure to get the Dragon Crest Shield.

HIT THE WALLS



Illusory walls are hidden throughout the land of Lothric and they often hide helpful loot or even whole areas that you'd otherwise miss. All it takes is to smash any suspect wall with your weapon and it'll vanish. Get in the habit early on of checking any bare areas or suspicious-looking walls to make sure you don't miss anything interesting.

EXPLORE



Dark Souls III is full of secrets – of course it is, it's a *Dark Souls* game. So make sure you check around every corner, speak to every NPC as often as you can and generally make yourself a denizen of its world, as this will help you enjoy the full experience and also you will get your fair share of all of the loot that's going around.

ASK FOR HELP



Summon signs will appear in certain areas, whether from real players or NPCs. Use them. Don't let anyone tell you that you *have* to beat every boss alone – the summoning mechanic wouldn't exist if From didn't encourage you to make use of it. Joining others in jolly cooperation can be really rewarding and is a key element in *Dark Souls*.



THE FUTURE IS HERE

Virtual Reality has almost arrived, and Sony is bringing it to the masses with PSVR. Oculus and Vive might be technically superior, but they don't appeal to the common man and woman. PlayStation's version does: it's affordable, works on your console without you needing to think and has some great games lined up for it. It might not be the most powerful, but it's definitely looking like the best. Here are six reasons why



CONTROLS

PSVR takes advantage of couple of things we already know and are familiar with: the Dualshock 4 and Move. While neither is built specifically for virtual reality, both have more than enough features about them to plug that non-specialised gap. Move is, of course, the preferred option – a free-moving wand that can be used as a hand (or two, if you've got a couple), we already know the tech works near-flawlessly. It's just a case of getting us used to using it alongside the VR headset.

The DualShock 4 option isn't likely to be the preferred one for most players, though it is still a viable option. There's something that takes you out of the immersion and away from the experience when you're using just a normal pad, but that isn't to say the PS4 controller isn't fit for purpose. As with Move, we already know it works brilliantly – and sometimes there's going to be the need for the improved level of control you get from a classic, well-designed pad. VR's not all going to be hand-waving and wands, after all.



PRICE AND BUNDLES

Hitting UK stores at £349.99, PSVR isn't in the same price range as your usual 'extra device for you console' option. Mainly because it's a bit more complex than that. But what do you get for the price? Well, for those 350 pound coins, you bag a headset, all of the cables required and not much else.

It's an unfortunate fact, but a fact nonetheless, that you will have to look at PSVR's bundles in order to get everything you need to be able to use virtual reality on PS4. If you already have the extras required, then that's great – but if not you'll need to look at a PSVR headset (and its cables etc.) alongside a PlayStation Camera, two PS Move wands and – why not – a demo disc and copy of *PlayStation VR Worlds*. Wouldn't you know it, that's the exact bundle Sony is offering in the US and Canada, called the PlayStation VR Launch Bundle, with a UK/European bundle expected to follow – likely at around £400-500 for everything. It isn't cheap, but it's a damn sight less costly than everything you need to get the Oculus or Vive up and running.

THE COMPETITION



OCULUS RIFT
The headset that began the craze, with the mind of John '*Doom*' Carmack heading up the tech team.



HTC VIVE
Vive differs from other VR headsets by tracking your whole body, requiring an entire ruddy room to use.



SAMSUNG GEAR VR
This entry-level VR headset might not have the bells and whistles of PSVR, Rift or Vive, but it is significantly cheaper.



GOOGLE CARDBOARD
On the bottom end of the price scale is Cardboard. Initially thought to be a joke, this thing *actually works*.



MICROSOFT HOLOLENS
This is more augmented than virtual reality. The potential is there, though, alongside its gigantic price tag.



"THIS IS A HUGE STEP FORWARD IN ANY TECHNOLOGICAL FIELD"

THE STANDARD

Speaking of Oculus and Vive, there's an area in which PSVR wins every single time: it is a standardised bit of hardware that works with a standardised console. There's no faffing about with different cable types, or ports, or graphics cards and RAM conflicts. You don't have to reformat half your OS to overcome stupid registry conflicts because of one misnamed file. You plug PlayStation VR – and its other bits – into the PS4, and it works. Never underestimate being able to plug something into your PlayStation and have it work immediately.

This is a huge step forward in any technological field. Standardisation in these terms is a very good thing, as it allows everyone to know exactly where they stand when it comes to PSVR. Developers know what the PS4 can do, so they know the kinds of games they can make for the headset, while players know that if they own a PS4 and buy a PSVR, it will work. There's no confusion, and that's a huge positive for PSVR.

DEV SUPPORT

If you were to compare developer support between Move's original release in 2010 and PSVR's 2016 release, you'd see one sizeable difference: the motion controller had around 35 development studios working on games for it. PSVR has around *230*.

We're not getting ahead of ourselves here – it's iron-cast fact that this will *not* lead to 230 games coming to PSVR, one each from every studio on the list. That's just how development is – not everything comes to fruition. But, even if only third of those studios make a game, it means we'll be seeing a *lot* of titles coming to PSVR – and the games are what this is all about. Sony is leveraging its status in the gaming world to lure teams into experimenting with VR, and these aren't just smaller, unknown studios.

You've got Capcom, 2K, EA, Crytek, Codemasters and more looking into PSVR. Even if it just meant Konami re-releasing the original *MGS* VR Missions add-on disc with *actual* VR implemented, that would make everything worth the time, effort and money.

TECH SPECS

PSVR isn't cheap, but then you are getting a solid device for your money – inside the headset you'll find a 5.7-inch OLED screen, capable of 1080p resolutions. The lenses in the headset offer up a little low-tech magic of their own, warping the image you see to provide the illusion of a 100-degree field of vision – which is necessary, otherwise you'd just be looking at a flat plane in front of you and there would be much less immersion. On-screen action has a latency of some 18 milliseconds, making it as fast as some of the best gaming monitors and TVs out there, while the 120hz refresh rate means things will be silky-smooth and not make you want to be sick.

The headset itself will connect to an external bit of hardware – PSVR's external processor, which handles a bit of the heavy lifting between the headset and the PS4 itself. This mini-machine has a great feature of its own – aside from all the leads going into it, you can hook up a TV via its HDMI Out port and others in the room will be able to watch, live, exactly what you're doing in your VR world. A nice extra touch.

THE FUTURE

The future of PSVR is going to be driven in the same way as everything else the company has done: by how well it is received by the public. If people don't buy the device, then Sony isn't going to keep on pumping money into it, even after spending millions on making the thing in the first place – see: Vita, Move, EyeToy et al. The PSVR will be no different.

But this is a huge step forward in gaming. We've seen VR before back in the Nineties, but to be perfectly honest, that was a big pile of shit – PlayStation VR is fantastic. It works, you'll be able to buy it for use in your own house, and it has some of the best game developers in the world working on it. It's being set up as the affordable, reliable option in the VR sphere and, frankly, it's been set up for great success. How well PSVR does could colour gaming as a whole for every generation to follow – we could well be on the cusp of a new era. That, or we could be on the verge of spending loads of money on something else we never use. Either way, it'll be exciting to see what happens.

THE BIG GAMES



RIGS

It is being made with high-speed, skill-based eSports in mind and may be *the* defining PSVR title.



PSVR WORLDS

Bundled with the device, *Worlds* is one of those compilations of different styles – a taster menu.



EVE VALKYRIE

This will strap your eyeballs into the cockpit of a fighter ship and jet you off into combat. Sign us up!



GRAN TURISMO SPORT

If we know anything about *Gran Turismo*, it's that it'll be bloody great to stare at through your VR goggles.



TEKKEN 7

You'll be using the PSVR for activities like watching matches – not actually punching other people.



★★★★★ TEN OF THE BEST ★★★★★ DEBUTS

IT'S NOT EASY TO GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME AROUND, BUT THESE PROVE THAT IT CAN BE DONE



PINBALL DREAMS

WHILE IT IS now primarily known for its work on *Battlefield*, it was pinball with which DICE was once most strongly associated thanks to the series of titles it developed after releasing its first game, *Pinball Dreams*, in 1992. Despite DICE doing well in the pinball genre, we hope you won't mind if we say we'd rather see *Battlefield 5* than a *Pinball Dreams* reboot or *Battlefield: Pinball*.



TIMESPLITTERS

IT'S A CREDIT to the work of now-defunct British studio Free Radical that its first game spawned one of the most fondly-remembered series of the PS2 era. Following in the footsteps of the likes of *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*, the fast-paced FPS became a favourite in no small part thanks to its focus on multiplayer, allowing you to play the campaign in split-screen co-op or go up against each other in bot-bolstered four-player multiplayer matches. The regularity with which it's cited as a series that should be revived tells you all you need to know about how loved it is.



MINECRAFT

SURELY THE GREATEST debut ever, at least in terms of numbers, is *Minecraft*? At the end of 2014, it was said to have sold 60 million copies across all platforms. Let's just repeat that: a debut game that's sold *60 million* copies. We reckon we would be pretty happy with that. Regardless of its commercial success, *Minecraft* also happens to be a great game that supports and rewards player creativity like few others.



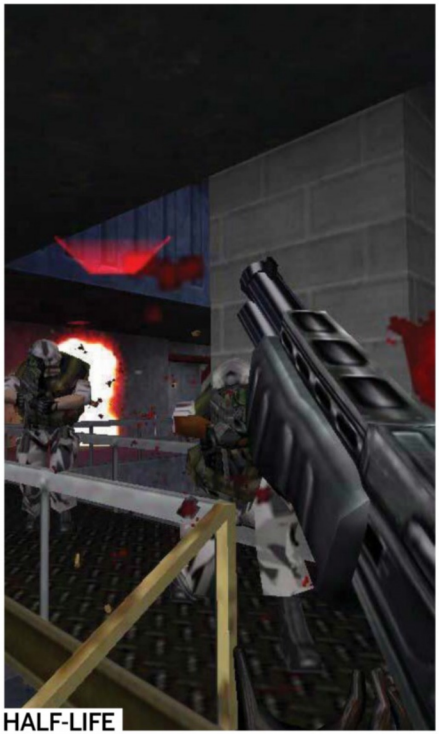
HOTLINE MIAMI

THE SUCCESS OF *Hotline Miami* wasn't down to a huge marketing budget; it was down to the quality of a game that generated buzz at every event it appeared at, drawing crowds that would eulogise its strengths to everyone. In our minds, this violent and introspective title is one of the greatest action games ever – it also has one of the best soundtracks of all time. For Dennaton to pull that off with its first release is truly incredible.



DARK CLOUD

YOU MIGHT KNOW Level-5 for PS3 JRPG *Ni No Kuni*, or perhaps its successful series of *Professor Layton* games, but did you know that the developer actually started out on PS2 all the way back in 2000? Its debut game was *Dark Cloud*, a RPG that blended *Zelda*-inspired combat with city-building elements. A slightly odd combination, but evidentially a successful one given that the game was well-regarded at the time. *Dark Cloud* was recently re-released on PS4 on the PlayStation Store, so you can easily give it a try if you're intrigued.



HALF-LIFE

LOOK BACK AT the history of Naughty Dog and you'll discover the likes of *Math Jam* and *Ski Crazed*. The point we are making is that even some of the most highly regarded studios working in the world today had an inauspicious start. That makes it even more impressive that Valve's debut was so spectacular. We're not just talking about a good game here – we are talking about a title that broke new ground, that was genre-defining, that set a new bar for the FPS. Not bad for a first try.



FREQUENCY

THE CHAMPION OF rhythm-action proved that it had musical pedigree from day one. The studio that brought you the original *Guitar Hero*, the *Rock Band* series and *Amplitude*, kicked it all off with *Frequency*. While not the greatest of Harmonix's output of rhythm-action titles, it is nevertheless a good first effort that laid the foundation for the great work that the studio would go on to do, establishing the note track template that would go on to appear in so many of its subsequent games.



VIEWTIFUL JOE

CAPCOM'S CLOVER STUDIO was packed full of talent: it included Resi mastermind Shinji Mikami, for example. It's not surprising, then, that Clover's first effort was rather good. Released in 2003, *Viewtiful Joe* received a well-earned 87% in issue 121 of **Play**. Also, before you start correcting us, we know that Clover was technically called Team Viewtiful at the time, but changing the name to Clover didn't make it a different studio, so there.



EARTHWORM JIM

THIS 2D PLATFORMER about a worm in a SuperSuit was lauded for its fluid animation and bizarre sense of humour, putting Shiny Entertainment on the map. In fact, if you're old enough, you might remember that *Earthworm Jim* was successful enough that it got its own TV series. We reckon most developers would be pretty pleased with that. If you want to play *Earthworm Jim*, a HD version of the game was released on PS3 via PSN.



LITTLEBIGPLANET

MEDIA MOLECULE IS a pioneer when it comes to creating games that encourage players to create. We've seen elements of that in *Tearaway* and upcoming PS4 exclusive *Dreams*, but, of course, it was Media Molecule's 2008 debut that started it all off. We're not going to claim that it is one of the greatest platformers of all time, but we think it is unique, creative and popular enough to warrant recognition as one of PlayStation's best debuts.

"SOME OF THE FIGHTS IN DARK SOULS III REQUIRE LEVELS OF PRECISION THAT MAKES SIMILAR GAMES LOOK LIKE A JOKE"



△○×□ Each area of the game has its own distinct style due to superb art direction.

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Dark Souls III

Through the fire and flames



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Bandai Namco

DEVELOPER
FromSoftware

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1-6

AGE RATING
16+

TWITTER
@DarkSoulsGame

Trophies 43

1 3 13 26

PS4

IS THIS THE end? It certainly feels like it, and although we wouldn't ever rule out additions to successful series such as this one, *Dark Souls III* does feel like a natural conclusion, not just in terms of its willingness to dredge up lore and items from past games, but the main reason is that this feels like the most complete FromSoftware experience across all disciplines. Obviously the template for these games is near enough set in stone now, but From has done just enough to make *Dark Souls III* feel like a fresh experience. There are new enemies, new boss fights and a new world to explore, all of which we'll come to in a bit, but first and foremost, it's the noticeable gameplay tweaks and improvements that make this an exciting addition to the series.

For one, *Dark Souls III* is much faster than the other games in the franchise. This is in part due to the ever-present influence of *Bloodborne*, which toed the line so brilliantly between typical *Souls* combat and the frenetic, button-mashing brilliance that the best hack-and-slash games purvey. *Bloodborne* is a terrifically aggressive game, and the relentless pace at which enemies – both normal and bosses – attempt to issue you a swift decapitation has carried over into *Dark Souls III*. This extends into all animations, meaning that acts like parrying are harder than ever and timing your rolls during a clutch boss fight feels almost overwhelming at first, as some of the fights in *Dark Souls III* require levels of precision that make similar games look like a joke. Movement in general is far smoother than in previous games and there's a huge amount of variety in enemy attacks for you to either relish or dread, depending on your outlook.

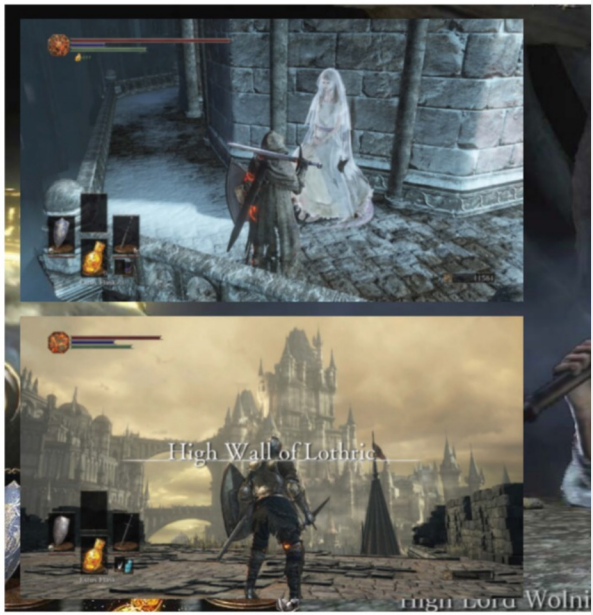
The inclusion of a Mana bar for the first time since *Demon's Souls* has been talked about a lot in the run-up to release, and no doubt you'll have seen it if you've been keeping up with footage from the stress test and preview events that have happened recently. In practice, it serves to power any Sorceries, Pyromancies or Miracles that you feel like using, as well as the new Weapon Arts that, again, you've likely heard all about. If you are a dirty caster, then having a Mana bar again will take some getting used to, as opposed to having limited uses per spell. If you're a *Demon's Souls* fan, you'll be right at home. As for Weapon Arts, we found them to be a really neat addition and although weapons from

IN THIS SERIES

DEMON'S SOULS Where it all began. *Demon's Souls* may feel a little long in the tooth nowadays, but if you're a *Dark Souls* fan, it's worth revisiting this PS3 exclusive.



△○×□ As is to be expected, there are plenty of nasty things lurking in the shadows.



△○×□ Solo exploration is crucial if you want to get the best out of *Dark Souls III*. Go in blind... if you dare.

similar class tend to share special skills, most of the rare weapons and boss soul weapons that we found had unique buffs and moves to play with. It shows a willingness for FromSoftware to spice up *Dark Souls*' combat a little bit, and although we didn't use Weapon Arts all that often, it's nice to know that they're new and they're there.

Part of the reason we didn't use Weapon Arts that often was that a lot of them involve big uppercuts, buffs or generic powerful attacks, all of which have quite lengthy wind-up times. One thing we can't stress enough about *Dark Souls III* is that you have to be on your toes; attacks come thick and fast, especially during boss encounters, and overall the whole thing feels harder than the original game, at least.

Much like in *Dark Souls II*, the game world doesn't feel as interconnected as the first game, but it's pretty much a combination of the first *Dark Souls* and *Demon's Souls*' hub-based effort. All of the areas are extremely varied, with the icy fortress Irithyll of the Boreal Valley and the red shores of Smouldering Lake being particular visual highlights. The new Firelink Shrine is much more like The Nexus from *Demon's Souls*, in that it's multi-layered and you naturally end up back there extremely often. This isn't just because you have to return to level up – it's that it serves as something of a commune for the weary souls you find wandering the wastes of Lothric. As in other *Souls* games, there's someone who teaches Sorceries, another person sells Miracles, and the same goes for Pyromancies and other bits and bobs. A lot of these NPCs have their own quest lines to follow, which can be a nice little interlude to distract you from the main aim of the game.

However, what the main aim of the game actually *is* leaves itself open to interpretation in classic *Dark Souls* style. This effort actually feels more obscure than the preceding games and by the end credits, we didn't feel as fulfilled as we'd have liked. This is often the way with these games, but *Demon's Souls* and the other two *Dark Souls* games felt like they had more narrative impetus. There's plenty that can be gleaned from item descriptions and NPC dialogue, but we didn't feel as attached to the lore this time out. Still, working out exactly what is going on in these games takes a number of playthroughs, and with a few repeat visits to Lothric, the final pieces will fall into place. There are three endings to experience in *Dark Souls III*, much like in *Bloodborne*, so there's more room for experimentation there, too.

Boss fights are, as usual, the centrepiece of the experience here. Rather than the repetitive 'creature with big sword/axe/mace' format of *Dark Souls II*, this game boasts a few of the very best encounters that From has ever dreamt up, each of them in their own interesting and grandiose arenas that lend a real sense of occasion whenever you drag your weary ashen soul through a fog gate. This is especially true towards the end of the game, when the difficulty ramps up considerably, contributing to that irresistible risk-versus-reward theme that permeates these games so thoroughly and successfully.

The whole game feels like it's had a bit of a spruce-up, which is likely down to it only appearing on PS4 this time out. In fact, it actually looks like an upgrade on *Blooodborne*, as the brighter, fiery locales have given the FromSoftware art team a little more room to flex its collective muscle. The soundtrack is the best in the series too, boasting a solid mix of typical *Dark Souls* cacophony and quiet, melodic interludes that make every boss encounter feel special and unique. Much like the fights themselves, these themes often change to reflect a new boss phase. It's superb.

Despite the really noticeable upgrades to textures, lighting and animation, we still experienced some breathtaking frame-rate drops in certain areas. By the time you read this you might find that it's been patched, but on the build we played, the sluggish behaviour in one area in particular towards the end of the game was on par with Blighttown in *Dark Souls*. As a *Souls* player, you come to expect issues like this in some places. A lot of people will make excuses for them, but really, there is no excuse for noticeable slowdown after a long development cycle. It's certainly not game-breaking in any way, and we didn't notice many other technical problems, but here's hoping it gets sorted soon.

www.imagineshop.co.uk





△○×□ If you're a new player, you need to understand something crucial – never, ever let yourself get grabbed by enemies.



"OUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT DARK SOULS III ULTIMATELY BOILED DOWN TO FEELING NOSTALGIC"

Our favourite thing about *Dark Souls III* ultimately boiled down to feeling nostalgic, though. Unlike in the second game where the references to Lordran, Gwyn, Seath and others were hidden away in NG+ boss souls or obscure item descriptions, in this effort they are extremely apparent. We won't spoil too much here, but there are several moments that will leave your mouth suitably agape if you're an existing fan of the series.

At the end of the day, it's these little nods to the past that make *Dark Souls III* so special. Some attempts at nostalgia are glaringly obvious, whereas others are relegated to item discoveries (a FromSoftware hallmark), but all of them hit the mark. Far from just being a trip down memory lane, though, in terms of gameplay this is without a doubt the pinnacle of everything that FromSoftware has ever built, and exploring Lothric and beyond is a morbid, stressful joy from start to finish, whether you're trekking through the murky swamps of Farron's Keep or sneaking past the haunted library aisles in the Grand Archives. It feels like this is a good place for the series to bow out – any more might see the formula become a little tired. Luckily for us, we've not reached that stage yet, and this is a fantastic experience from start to finish. Whether you're a newcomer to the series or a Sun-praising veteran, this is the most polished *Souls* game to date and quite possibly the best £50 you'll spend all year.

Steve Holmes

VERDICT

Packed with some of the series' most remarkable areas and encounters, *Dark Souls III* is an invigorating action-RPG that is undoubtedly one of the best games on PS4.

9 PlayMag_UK scored **9** for Dark Souls III

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

PLAY CHALLENGE



SHARE THESE FEATS, IF YOU CAN...

RING MY BELL

△ **IN ARCHDRAGON KEEP** you'll reach a bell with messages next telling you not to ring. Ignore them, ring it and have fun.

SPEED IS KEY

○ **BY THE TIME** you read this, people will have already done the game in ridiculously quick times. Try it for yourself!

Beaten our trials? Let us know @PlayMag_UK!





△○×□ Drifting in *TrackMania*, when done correctly, is a pleasure to witness.





△○×□ The hidden Trackmaster medal for nailing a perfect run is hard to come by, but it's ever so satisfying when it pops.

TrackMania Turbo

Too fast, we're furious



DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft

DEVELOPER Nadeo

PSN PRICE £29.99

PLAYERS 1-100

INSTALL SIZE 3.8 GB

AGE RATING 3+

TWITTER @Trackmania

Trophies 49

1 2 10 36

PS4

DRIVE. TURN. CRASH. Repeat. Drive. Turn. Crash. Throw controller to the ground. Repeat. In Nadeo's console debut, this is an all-too familiar process for those of a competitive disposition, seeing that it's the most delightfully stress-inducing racer seen this year – it's pretty scary how *everything* can go wrong in just a few seconds.

There's a lot of love for the likes of *WipEout* and *F-Zero* that comes across in *TrackMania*'s gameplay, which equates to high-octane racing where the slightest mistake can ruin a good run. Over the course of 200 tracks, you'll encounter a whole host of different environments. Anything from simple track racing, to off-roading, beach buggying, and even frighteningly disorientating magnetic roads-turned-rollercoasters.

To *TrackMania*'s credit, it does a fantastic job with its learning curve. It's rare that a track doesn't have any specific tricks to learn. You won't really think about it at the time but that pinpoint muscle memory for a particular manoeuvre is going to come in handy in about 40 tracks' time. And, of course, in true *TrackMania* fashion, you'll need be on guard for any little tricks Nadeo may want you to traverse at the worst possible times. Moments like that will often have you out of your seat just before the finish line screaming, "WHAT THE F**K WAS THAT CRANE DOING THERE?!" We can't even begin to stress enough how utterly infuriating those moments are on the few multi-lap events each section hosts.

Unlocking the harder tracks reaches a point where only the best will be able to do it. Getting a gold medal on the first 160 tracks to unlock the final 40 is a big ask, and it's a real acid test to see who's got the skills to pull it off. Thankfully, though, for those who don't quite have the ability to get to the big boy tracks (Black Series), these can be accessed online and in the regular arcade mode, which utilises a neat three-life credit system.

Jumping in to the local 'Double Driver' campaign, where multiple players control the same car, is a pleasant surprise and it works rather well. Prior to release, it sounded questionable at best and seemed to be heading towards 'play it for ten minutes for a laugh' territory. But the aggregation of pad inputs works really

FOR FANS OF... △ **TRIALS FUSION** The home of stick-twitching, gas-feathering, time-attacking gameplay. If you haven't played a *Trials* game before, go buy a crate of Monster and never stop playing.



solidly and at times, as we discovered, putting a twitchy driver with a steady driver can cancel out errors, giving a smooth racing line. On top of this unique mode, there's a handful of other typical local multiplayer options such as your standard time attack (Hot Seat), split-screen multiplayer and a handful of hidden modes under the 'Secret' menu, one of which offers a *Micro Machines*-style single-screen elimination mode.

Racing online, however, is in a league of its own. With lobbies of up to 100 racers, each vying for a place on the podium, seeing everybody's ghosts drop down from the helicopter at the beginning – when the entire track gets covered with opaque cars as other players try to find the best line – is an hilarious start to any race. Don't let it confuse you, though, or you're *going* to fail.

As if there wasn't a wealth of content already, Nadeo, as always, has provided *TrackMania* with a track creator. It's instantly clear to see, though, when firing it up how clunky it is to use on console. When it comes to games with user-generated content, it's often a case of there being diamonds in the rough *somewhere*, with the rest being an absolute car crash. This is a classic case of that and we're thankful for the 'Sort' function. We have, however, been blessed with the all-new Random Track Generator which, despite the loading times, is a really solid addition to the franchise. You'll never get the same track twice – simply pick a time of day and a length of track on the environment you want and it'll procedurally generate a course in front of your very eyes.

Ubisoft has hit a decent stride of late and has managed to produce, with Nadeo, a strong introduction to the console world for *TrackMania*. This generation has been longing for a great arcade racer and, with a bit of tuning to some of its gears, *TrackMania* could easily find its way on to anyone's wish list.

Liam Warr

"IT'S PRETTY SCARY HOW EVERYTHING CAN GO WRONG IN THE SPACE OF SECONDS"

VERDICT

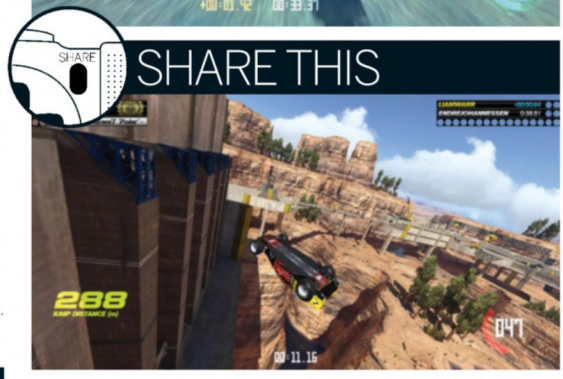
It'd be very easy to refer to this as a 3D *Trials*, and while this is a fair observation in a lot of ways, *Turbo* is not exactly the tight arcade racer some might have been expecting.

8 PlayMag_UK scored **8** for TrackMania Turbo

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

△○✕□ **We still can't figure out why sometimes you can skim across the water like a pebble.**





DO A BARREL ROLL

Keep rollin', rollin', rollin', rollin'

It's best to get in the swing of things early and avoid moving onto the next track until you've at least got a silver medal. In the early stages you'll soon realise how redundant the checkpoint respawn is as you'll almost always need to have a clean run to get the silver. Sometimes, though, when you get thrown off-track, flipping unnaturally through the air, you often can't help but try and ace the landing and try to still get that medal. Bonus points if you can inexplicably bounce off the water and back on track to get the medal – don't forget to smash the Share button!

"LEVELS OOZE PERSONALITY THE FIRST TIME YOU POP, HOP AND GLIDE THROUGH THEM"







△○×□ We're astounded by how pretty *Ratchet & Clank* looks. The attention to detail is particularly good.



Ratchet & Clank

Lombax To The Future



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Insomniac Games

PSN PRICE
£29.99

PLAYERS
1

INSTALL SIZE
23.7 GB

AGE RATING
7

TWITTER
@insomniacgames

Trophies 47

1 2 14 30

PS4

IN 2002, INSOMNIAC did an admirable job of riding on Pixar and Dreamworks' rocketing fame by bringing that bombastic sense of animated fun to CRT TV screens – vivid worlds, well-realised and emotive characters and a cheeky nudge-nudge, wink-wink sense of humour carried a fairly average game through ten-or-so hours of innocent fun. 14 years later, not much has changed. But that's a good thing.

Ratchet & Clank (the new one) is a beautiful beast – one of the most technically impressive games we've seen on the PS4 yet, proving you don't have to have *Bloodborne*'s tendrils and gloom or *MGSV*'s insane draw distances to look *good*. It's the vistas that hit you first with *Ratchet & Clank*, then the detail of the character models follows up for a sucker punch, but then the minutiae gets you: the real-time reflections, the tiny, *tiny* animations Ratchet will perform when idling or moving, and the insane amount of nuts, bolts and scrap you can pump out of the game at any one time.

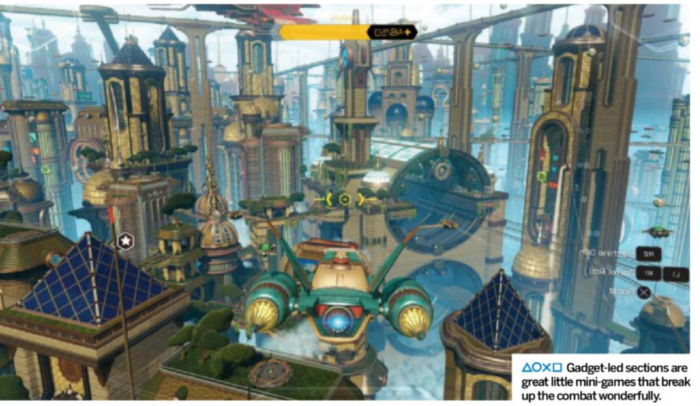
Insomniac's pedigree in gunplay has only become more polished over the 14-year gulf since we first met Ratchet, too: our favourite combat combo was making enemies dance with the Groovitron, turning them into 3D voxel messes with the Pixeliser, lacing that funky beat with the deafening thud of the Photon Drum, then blasting them to bits with a Fusion Grenade or two. This never gets old, and that's somewhat fortunate: that tactic works for pretty much *every* encounter in the game.

So that's the downside: the game is stupendously easy. A cakewalk. Even on Hard mode, you can waltz through it in less than ten hours, and if you're keen on going back to collect everything, you'll be greeted with deserted levels: few respawns or challenges await completionists. It's a damn shame too, because *Ratchet & Clank*'s levels ooze personality the first time you pop, hop and glide through them. At least there's the bonus Challenge mode that tests out your combat skills a bit more, but even then, if you've got your weapons powered up fully, you can still just sleepwalk through it.

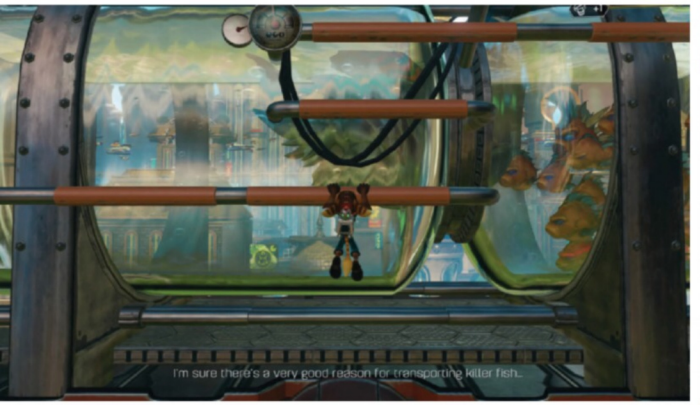
Collectable cards are a nice addition, and give some flavour to wider *Ratchet*

IN THIS SERIES

RATCHET & CLANK HD COLLECTION Because there's no better way of learning the ropes and getting your teeth into the series than playing through the original trilogy.



△○×□ Gadget-led sections are great little mini-games that break up the combat wonderfully.



△○×□ The environments are diverse and each one looks amazing.





& Clank lore, and a weapon upgrade system grants the game that fantastic 'just one more hour' hook in your brain. You want to keep playing, just to level up your favourite weapon of destruction: it's anarchic, and satisfying.

Unfortunately, between each intense bout of crazy action, there's a lull when the story wakes up and dangles itself in front of your face. Yes, there's some of that now-classic Insomniac double-entendre, and yes, the caricatured characters can't help but coax a grin out of you, but the cutscenes from the film (which look *incredible*, by the way) feel a little jarring in the game. They're rushed, pacing-wise, and sometimes coming from a film sequence back into the game, there'll be a few verbal non-sequiturs. It's nothing game-ruining, but it impacts on the flow of the whole experience somewhat.

All that said, this is a game aimed at kids, so it's probably better to go into it with the mentality of watching a cartoon: expect to be entertained, not cerebrally challenged. And when *Ratchet & Clank* is good, it's *good*. We routinely stayed on the PS4 playing this *way* later than we intended because the mindless action is just so addictive: it taps into what made all the action-platformers of the PSone and PS2 era so damn good – collectibles, stupid stories, anthropomorphised heroes and bucketloads of charm. *Ratchet & Clank* has proved that that's still *fun*, and we hope it heralds the coming of another action-platform renaissance.

Dom Peppiatt

VERDICT

A technical marvel, and a loyal homage to its predecessors. Insomniac has made a triumphant return to the franchise that made it famous. Play it for entertainment, not challenge.

PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Ratchet & Clank

8

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

PLAY CHALLENGE



SHARE THESE FEATS, IF YOU CAN...



DANCE, DANCE

△ **EVERY ENEMY TYPE** dances differently when hit with the Groovitron. We want to see screenshots of some good parties!



PUT THE GAME TO WORK

□ **BY THE END** of the game, you can get over 20 enemies on-screen at a time: let's see you survive *that* on NG+.

Beaten our trials? Let us know @PlayMag_UK!





△○×□ There are dozens of vehicles to choose from, ranging from Sixties, Seventies and Eighties rally classics to modern day supercars.



Dirt Rally

Mudborne



PS4

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1-8

INSTALL SIZE
45 GB

AGE RATING
3+

TWITTER
@dirtgame

Trophies 48

1 2 7 38

GIVEN ITS INCREDIBLY steep difficulty curve, *Dirt Rally* has often been compared to *Bloodborne*, or *Dark Souls*. But that's not exactly fair. In *Dark Souls*, you can make the odd mistake. In *Dirt Rally*, one wrong manoeuvre – one corner entered too quickly, one imperceptible bump in the track taken at the wrong angle – and it's all over. And we do mean *all*. There's no rewind function, no checkpoints or instant car recovery. Even pressing pause and restarting the event will cost you precious in-game credits. This is racing at its purest and most precarious. Codemasters opens *Dirt Rally* with a written message to players, informing them that it considers rally driving the most challenging of all motorsports. From thereon, the developer's respect for its subject matter is clear in every single aspect of the game. Cars are rendered in impeccable detail. Mud, ice and rain complicate every track. Your co-driver speaks in measured, monotone instruction.

It's his voice that makes *Dirt Rally*. The amount of work Codemasters has put into his audio track, not just filling it with real-life jargon, but ensuring it keeps up with your progress as you hammer around the track, shows a huge commitment to the intricacies of rally driving. Racing games as of late, particularly *Forza Horizon* over on Xbox One, have become stooped in irony and jocularity – crashing around in a priceless supercar, to the thumping sound of some soulless Radio One dance mix is the new black, apparently. *Dirt Rally* doesn't go too far the other way. It's not pretentious and dry, like *Ride*, or the later *Gran Turismo* games. It just has a quiet, well-researched respect for the sport it represents. As the co-driver coolly issues his pace notes – "Right six over crest, into left four, tightening to three, rocks on exit, into left six, 40, into right three bad camber, don't cut" – you feel both confident and uncertain. Listen carefully to what you're being told, and pay close attention to the road, and you can blast through *Dirt Rally* at top speed. Go into it all brazen – fail to show it the same respect that Codemasters has – and you'll never get anywhere. In a world where games are increasingly about pandering and ease of comprehension, *Dirt Rally* has the self-assuredness to tell

> "THIS IS RACING AT ITS PUREST AND MOST PRECARIOUS"



△○×□ Your co-driver is vital, and Codemasters has gone to a lot of effort to make his directions sound authentic.

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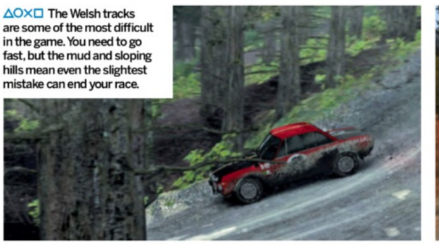








△○×□ The Welsh tracks are some of the most difficult in the game. You need to go fast, but the mud and sloping hills mean even the slightest mistake can end your race.







players to sit down and listen. It's hard not to admire such confidence.

Dirt Rally's difficulty, and its adherence to rally mythos, can be trying at times. When you reach the final corner of one of the intensely difficult Wales tracks, only to be sent flying off the course by a single, errant rock, you can't help but feel hard done by – sometimes, no matter how skilfully you race or pay attention to your co-driver, *Dirt* will screw you over. Managing your team can be a bit of a chore, also. To keep your car running, you have to find and recruit new engineers and pit staff, each with different specialities. It's a nice touch, lending *Dirt* some more of that all important depth, but it's occasionally fussy. Scanning a list of a hundred names, looking for that one person who's both affordable and able to repair your transmission, makes *Dirt* feel more like a management sim than a racer. And their contracts are finite. Every few championships, you have to hire in a whole new staff, making it hard to tell who you're supposed to be playing – are you the driver, the crew chief or somebody from Human Resources?

But that's a petty gripe, as is complaining about the graphics. Compared to some of its contemporaries, *Dirt* doesn't look so sophisticated. But who cares? This is a racing game with legitimate love for its topic. It doesn't patronise, it doesn't pander and when you finish playing it, you come away feeling genuinely smarter. As both an education on, and a love letter to, the sport of rally driving, *Dirt* is a resounding success.

Ed Smith

VERDICT

Brutal, yet hugely rewarding, *Dirt Rally* both understands and respects its eponymous sport. It doesn't patronise with gimmicky mechanics, nor is it a dry, joyless simulation.

9

PlayMag_UK scored **9** for Dirt Rally

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



PLAY CHALLENGE



SHARE THESE FEATS, IF YOU CAN...



NAIL IT

△ **FLIP YOUR CAR**, roll it back onto its wheels and carry on racing. Extra points if you go on to win.



FRONT ROW SEAT

□ **SWITCH TO THE** first-person camera and finish a race without crashing. Listen to your co-driver very closely!

Beaten our trials? Let us know @PlayMag_UK!

OR YOU COULD TRY △ **GRID AUTOSPORT** A rock-hard, detailed racing simulator. Rather than extraneous features or gimmicks, it focuses on realistic damage and authentic driving.

Day Of The Tentacle Remastered

You'd be a sucker to miss it





DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Double Fine Productions

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£11.99

PLAYERS
1

INSTALL SIZE
1.8GB

AGE RATING
3

TWITTER
@DoubleFine

Trophies 58

1 1 3 53

PS4

ALSO ON VITA

WE LOVE ADVENTURE games, but we hate having to play them on old systems. It's not that we mind the outdated graphics – it's just that swapping between a dozen disks and having to contend with outdated interfaces gets in the way of all the fun. Luckily, we can bung our Amiga back in the loft now, because *Day Of The Tentacle* has been spruced up for PS4 and it's looking mighty fine indeed.

"DAY OF THE TENTACLE IS ONE OF THE FEW GAMES WHICH TRIES TO BE AMUSING AND ACTUALLY SUCCEEDS"

The plot, which isn't the most detailed in the world, involves Purple Tentacle drinking a bunch of sludge which makes him turn a bit evil and start plotting to take over the world. Green Tentacle isn't really up for that, and enlists the help of a trio of slightly bizarre humans to help stop him – and Bernard, Laverne and Hoagie are the people you'll be controlling. It's perhaps unusual to say of an adventure game, but the plot is something of a backdrop to the actual gameplay here, providing the setting for cartoonish gags and little else. Luckily, those wacky gags are well worth the price of admission – *Day Of The Tentacle* is one of the few games which tries, with gusto, to be amusing and succeeds.

The updated presentation is good overall. It's got that jagged, pointy look that a lot of alternative comics and cartoons of the Nineties used, but it's clearly a stylistic choice. The game remains bright and colourful, and the animations are well worth paying attention to. The only downside is that certain elements where dithering was used in the original haven't been updated well, leading to some noticeable spots of vertical lines. Fortunately, the voice acting is present and correct, although the recording understandably sounds less than perfect due to the age of the original game. The best bit of the remaster is the improved command wheel interaction system, which mimics that of *Broken Age*. Of course, if none of this is to your liking, you can always switch to the original interface and visuals, though this option is really only presented for purists.

Day Of The Tentacle has aged pretty well compared to many of its peers, simply because so much of the fun comes from actually interacting with the world and characters – it was designed to be the first LucasArts adventure where players couldn't die or get stuck, and it shows. While many games of the era suffered from obtuse puzzles that practically required the purchase of a strategy guide, the trial and error of *Day Of The Tentacle*'s puzzles is part of the fun – it doesn't necessarily matter if you're making progress when you're having a bizarre conversation with the USA's Founding Fathers.

In terms of added extras, you might find that the developers' commentary is an interesting addition – we'd like to see it in more remaster projects, especially when changes have been made. There's also a concept art gallery, which will be welcome to super-fans, but not a whole lot else to be seen. However, there's a



FOR FANS OF... **GRIM FANDANGO** More Tim Schafer remaster work? Oh yes. The adventuring here is just as vital, but the integration of puzzle and plot feels tighter in general.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

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△○×□ *DOTT*'s humour is still on point today. It even gets pretty dark in places...



fully playable bonus game included in the form of *Maniac Mansion*, the game that *Day Of The Tentacle* is a loose sequel to, which was also part of the original game's design. This has not been updated, but, then again, that would really be asking a lot, plus it's fair to say that *DOTT* supersedes it in many ways.

If you're the kind of player that loves old point-and-click adventures, *Day Of The Tentacle* is a no-brainer – you'll have a blast reliving a classic adventure, and you can do so as you please. For those of you who aren't approaching the game with a set of rose-tinted glasses on, we're confident that Double Fine has done enough to make the game appealing on more than just a nostalgic level. It's a testament to the original design that the game remains legitimately funny and far less frustrating than other examples of the genre, but Double Fine should be commended for the functional updates made to the game – the new interface brings the game closer to the kind of adventure experience you'd expect today, and the visuals have been modernised without losing their distinctive charm.

Nick Thorpe

VERDICT

***Day Of The Tentacle Remastered* will wrap itself around any adventure game fan and refuse to let them go, regardless of whether they have any nostalgia for the original or not.**

8 PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Day Of The Tentacle Remastered
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



MOST ANNOYING GUEST EVER
You can easily miss this one – ring the service bell at the front desk and don't stop until you've done it 100 times.



CHEF
An achievement for a game within a game? Blimey. Check out the infamous hamster microwaving scene in *Maniac Mansion* for this one.

△○×□ You'll frequently find dialogue trees which lead to nothing but punchlines – not that we mind.







△○×□ As well as redrawn visuals, we are treated to developer commentary tracks.





EA Sports UFC 2

The greatest of all time... thus far



DETAILS

PUBLISHER EA

DEVELOPER EA Canada

PSN PRICE £54.99

PLAYERS 1-2

AGE RATING 7+

INSTALL SIZE 19.41GB

TWITTER @EASPORTSUFC

Trophies 34

1 5 11 17

PS4

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS is such a complicated sport that it's easy to feel as if a truly great, truly definitive MMA videogame could never even exist. *EA Sports UFC 2* builds on the many successes of its predecessor (several of which were actually achieved via patches in the year following launch) but a solution still hasn't been found for the biggest problem of all. Namely: how on earth do you make the ground game as interesting as the stand-up?

Ground grappling in the original *EA UFC* was so confusing that most players chose to almost completely ignore it. This may prove to be true of the sequel too, but the grappling system has been undeniably improved, with those befuddling half-circle inputs replaced with four straight thumbstick prompts, alongside straight and clear visual information about what exactly you're attempting to do with them. It's a scheme that's both easier to grasp and much more intuitive than before, but that still doesn't make it exciting. In a way, it's an impossible situation. Make the ground-based gameplay any more complex and players are just competing in a series of mini-games; the branded beat-'em-up they purchased only available when both avatars get back on their feet. In a strange way, it even mirrors the sport itself. They may create more unique paths to more hard-won victories than any other style of fighter, but nothing turns off the UFC's millions of fans quite like a methodical practitioner of Greco-Roman wrestling.

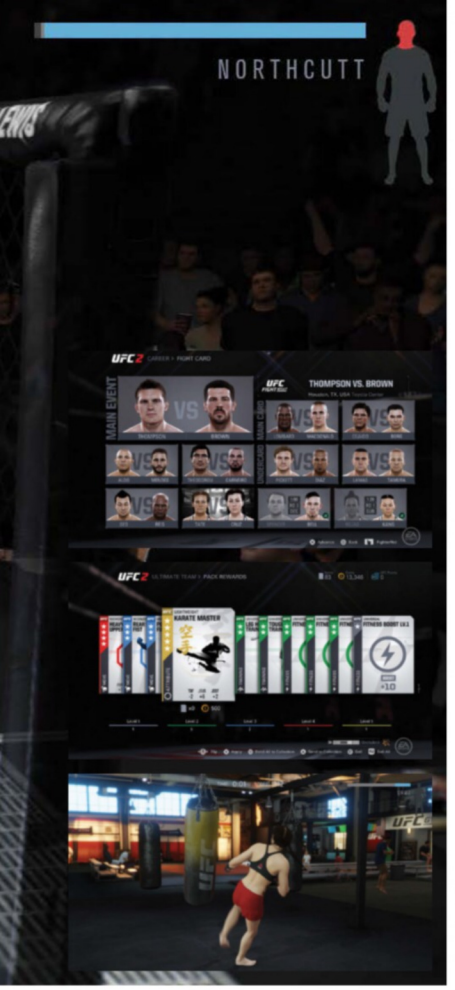
> "IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING DISCIPLINED, OBSERVANT AND CHOOSING THE PERFECT MOMENTS IN WHICH TO ATTACK"

Visually, the game is often jaw-dropping and seemingly every visual detail – from stray flashbulbs that send shimmers of light through the crowd, to flecks of perspiration cruising through the air during replays – has been enhanced and polished. Creating something breathtaking was clearly pretty high on EA's agenda, but this means that the combat is still way too sluggish and ungainly, with lightweights occasionally striding and throwing strikes like exhausted super heavyweights. Rather

OR YOU COULD TRY

STREET FIGHTER V In many ways the polar opposite of *EA UFC 2*, *SFV* is arguably the premier fighting game in the world right now. Brace yourself, though – it's fast.

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△○×□ The original *EA UFC* was improved with free DLC and patches for a whole year. Will the sequel follow suit?



amazingly, you still can't effectively rush a stunned opponent because the game simply doesn't do speed. Watching a fighter capitalise after flummoxing an adversary is one of the most exciting things that can happen in the Octagon, and yet it can't be replicated here.

For all of its problems, though, *EA UFC 2* is a game that only gets more engaging the more time you spend with it. The AI has been greatly improved, with opponents in single-player sticking to the style of the fighter in question and rarely (if ever) falling for any cheap tricks. If you find success with a certain move or manoeuvre and try to shamelessly repeat it, the AI will start ruthlessly reacting with a parry or a brutal counter strike. Similarly, if you only block high, they'll start going for your gut almost non-stop. Both online and off, like any good fighting game, *EA UFC 2* is all about being disciplined, observant and choosing the perfect moments in which to attack.

As you'd expect from the studio behind *FIFA*, this is a thoughtful and comprehensive package, genuinely constructed with the fans in mind. Knockout Mode, which deserves to become a series staple from now on, gives players five energy panels (you lose one every time you're on the receiving end of a significant strike), no stamina constraints and no grappling. It's essentially a no-frills offline kickboxing game, completely lacking in depth and subtlety, but a totally unbeatable tool for settling couch-based grudges. Ultimate Team (which allows you to build a team of five fighters if one isn't enough) is as ingenious and compulsive as its *FIFA* counterpart, with combat perks, attributes and stat boosters replacing football players. Custom Events lets you name and build a fantasy UFC card from scratch for arguably the ultimate local co-op experience. And last but definitely not least, Live Events is a work of genius: play through and predict the outcomes of upcoming UFC events and your successful predictions will net you a respectable stack of currency.

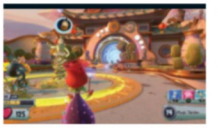
Career Mode is disappointingly ordinary (and, frankly, too dull to stick with until the climax) but as both of this year's cover stars will tell you, you can't win them all. A most impressive second round.

Chet Roivas

△○×□ Parrying is only viable against opponents spamming one move – the window is often too small to nail them.



TROPHY CABINET



RISKY BUSINESS
Use a BJJ fighter and get into a standing back clinch before moving into a rear naked choke. Easiest method.

THE LEGEND
Keep an eye on your record. This Trophy unlocks only after you've won a set number of online fights in a row.

VERDICT

It still isn't perfect as we'd like, but *UFC 2* is a model sequel. It's prettier, more accessible and with more content and superior modes, it's a solid entry. TKO.

8 PlayMag_UK scored **8** for EA Sports UFC 2

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

Enter The Gungeon

More guns than you can shake a gun at



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Devolver Digital

DEVELOPER
Dodgeroll Games

PRICE
£10.99

PLAYERS
1-2

INSTALL SIZE
1.1 GB

AGE RATING
12+

TWITTER
@DodgeRollGames

Trophies 49

1 2 12 34

PS4

TO SAY THAT *Enter The Gungeon* is a game about guns would in no way be a vague description. Every available inch includes a reference to a weapon from a videogame, movie, TV show or historical moment. It's also a solid experience full of content and isn't afraid to push your abilities. Some will be put off by the difficulty, others by the lack of roguelike permanence and synergy, but if you are grabbed by the first 'wink, wink' moment then there are only good things to come.

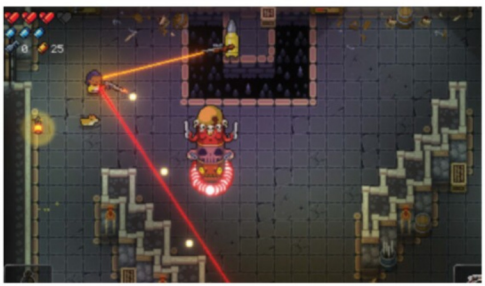
It's a twin-stick shooter built around the player's ability to aim while dodging tides of projectiles. Every one of the four starting characters has a pistol plus a combination of extra weapons and items. Killing enemies grants spent casings which you can exchange in shops, which every floor has one of. The layout of the titular Gungeon is randomly generated each time with room types and enemy configurations varied enough to keep it exciting.

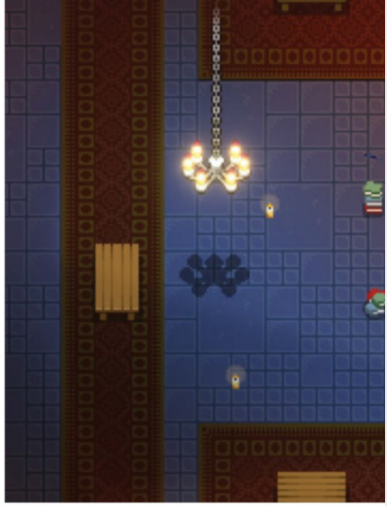
The enemy designs are plentiful, with anthropomorphic bullets standing alongside walking grenades, wizards and the occasional iron maiden. These designs are consistently clever and nostalgic, such as the more obvious reference of a Darknut-inspired knight. The bosses are in a league of their own, though: all 20 of them are completely unique, yet they will immediately look rather familiar. Gatling Gull is a beefy muscle-man with a minigun, clearly a pun-tastic take on Vulcan Raven from *Metal Gear Solid*; the Beholster is a not-so-subtle Beholder/Cacodemon riff; meanwhile, the Gorgun is a Gorgon with dual Uzis. Naturally.

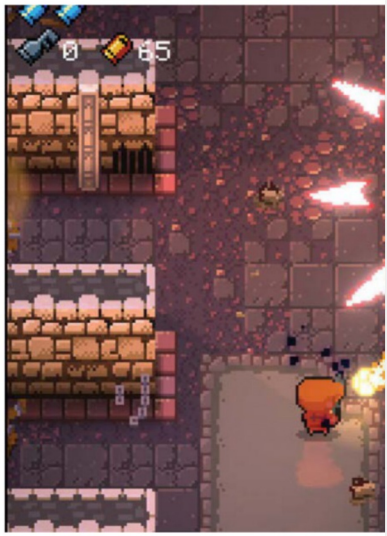
But these varied boss and enemy designs aren't just visually unique as every single type will have its own behaviour and, therefore, encourages you to employ different tactics. If you come into a room with snipers, you'll want to deal with them first, while rubber bullets, otherwise harmless, will try to bump you into spike pits and green blobs will leave trails of poison.

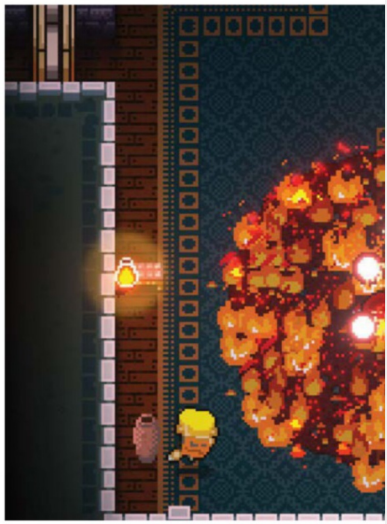
To combat these enemies, you have access to an arsenal of over 190 guns that vary from the very obvious, such as a Thompson machine gun, to the clever, like the Helix that fires twin shots, to the downright obscure, such as the Gungeon Ant that sprays oil initially then flips when you reload it to shoot fire. Many of the guns have very unique mechanics in this way and getting to know each of them will take time, but that's the joy of roguelikes.

Still, fans of this type of thing may be disappointed, because although the gun and item selection is plentiful, there









FOR FANS OF...

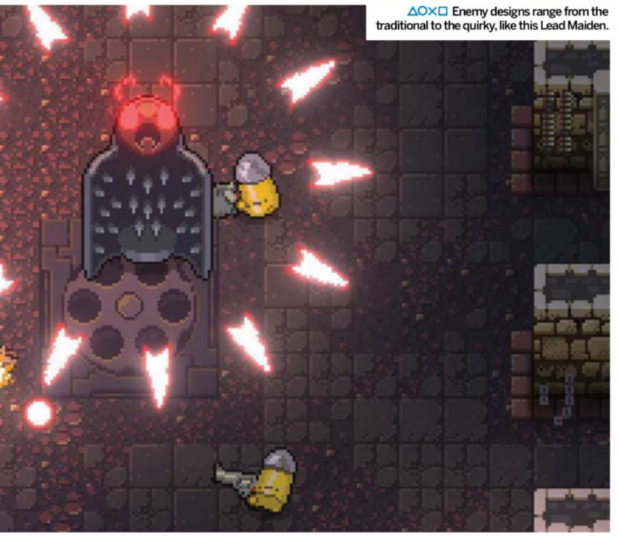
THE BINDING OF ISAAC While it has a much heavier focus on synergy, *The Binding of Isaac* similarly caters to gamers who like to take progression in tiny, painful steps.

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△○×□ Enemy designs range from the traditional to the quirky, like this Lead Maiden.



"THE GORGUN IS A GORGON WITH DUAL UZIS... NATURALLY"

is nothing in the way of 'upgrades' to your character. Instead, you expand the loot pool with new guns and items by defeating bosses and earning credits, which you then spend in a shop in the hub. Perks aside, the four characters are basically the same – it would have been nice to see one with faster movement or an improved dodge roll. There's also little synergy between guns and items: oil can be set on fire and water electrified, but the opportunities to do this are irregular at best. This ultimately means that the onus on getting better is entirely down to you throughout your individual runs: while some guns are innately more powerful or easier to use, you will never end up in a situation where your current selection feels particularly empowered and by the end of the game, you are only as good as you were at the start. This can lead to a frustrating feeling of a lack of progress.

There's a depth of quantity here that is backed up for the most part by its excellent quality: art and character design is sublime and the pacing never feels off, and there's so much content that you can't say that it comes up short in replayability, but the fact that each playthrough feels similar thanks to the standard character mechanics and lack of true 'progression' means that sessions don't last as long as in, say, *The Binding of Isaac*. But you'll still feel the itching in your trigger finger if you haven't played it recently because once you're hooked on finding every one of those many guns, it's hard to quit.

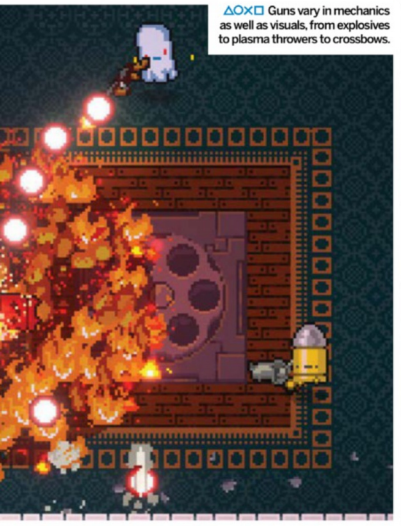
David Ruddock

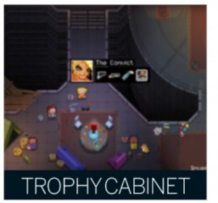
VERDICT

A great-looking game with a hell of a lot of content hidden inside it, but the steep difficulty curve and lack of real progression may not sit too well with more casual players.

8 PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Enter The Gungeon
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

△○×□ Guns vary in mechanics as well as visuals, from explosives to plasma throwers to crossbows.



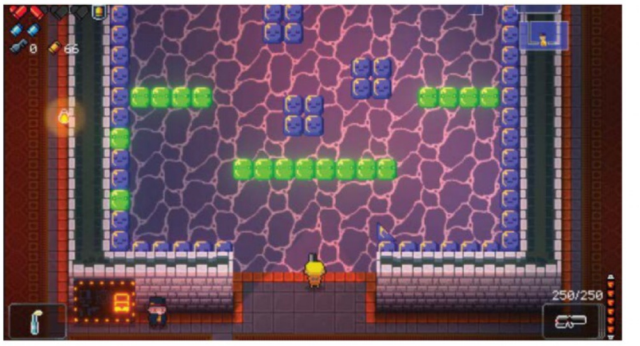


TROPHY CABINET

I KNEW SOMEONE WOULD DO IT
Messing with some tables near pits will net you an easy Trophy.



MONEY PIT
Environmental hazards are easy to miss, but if you lure enemies to them you'll get this Trophy much quicker.





Salt And Sanctuary

Sodium Souls



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Ska Studios

DEVELOPER
In-house

PRICE
£14.99

PLAYERS
1-2

INSTALL SIZE
1.78 GB

AGE RATING
16+

TWITTER
@skastudios

Trophies 38

1 4 13 20

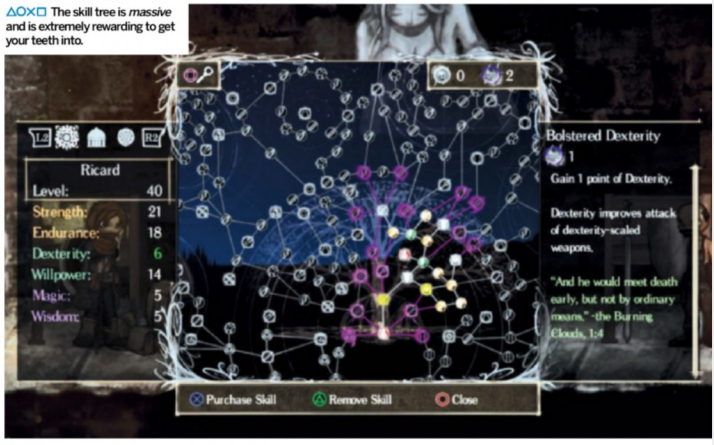
PS4

JUST TAKE A look at those screenshots for a second – go on, we'll wait. What do you see? Health bar? Stamina bar? Quick select item menu? Soul, wait, *Salt* counter? Yeah, we don't even need to say what Ska Studios has taken as its inspiration for *Salt And Sanctuary*. The parallels are so telegraphed that they may as well be written on the insides your eyelids.

Riffing on a successful game is fine – just take a look at the storied competition between old *Tomb Raider*, *Uncharted* and new *Tomb Raider* and you'll see how this back-and-forth can give birth to excellent games. *Salt And Sanctuary* and *Souls*' relationship, however, takes it to an extreme. *Salt And Sanctuary* is a *Souls* zealot, kissing the feet of FromSoftware and emulating everything From does without really forging much of an identity for itself. That's not to say it's a bad game, it just barely innovates on its source material and ripping out an entire dimension and presenting the game as a 2D side-scroller does little to change that.

So, continuing from the stuff we touched upon earlier, you have your bleak world: check. Enemies that drop a resource used to level up: check. Replenishable health potion: check. Punishing difficulty: check. Players leaving messages to each other: check. The fundamentals are *exactly* the same, which is fine if you like *Souls* games but if you're a genre sceptic then you're going to feel short-changed. Ska replicates most of these elements perfectly, mind, so if you, like us, have the masochistic tendency to play this kind of game then you'll most likely have a merry old time with it and it sure is a valid accomplishment for a development team that consists of just two people.

Ska *does* bring a couple new mechanics into the mix. You can upgrade each Sanctuary (basically a Bonfire) you visit to have fast-travel, a merchant, missions and clerics, with the possibility of turning each Sanctuary into your very

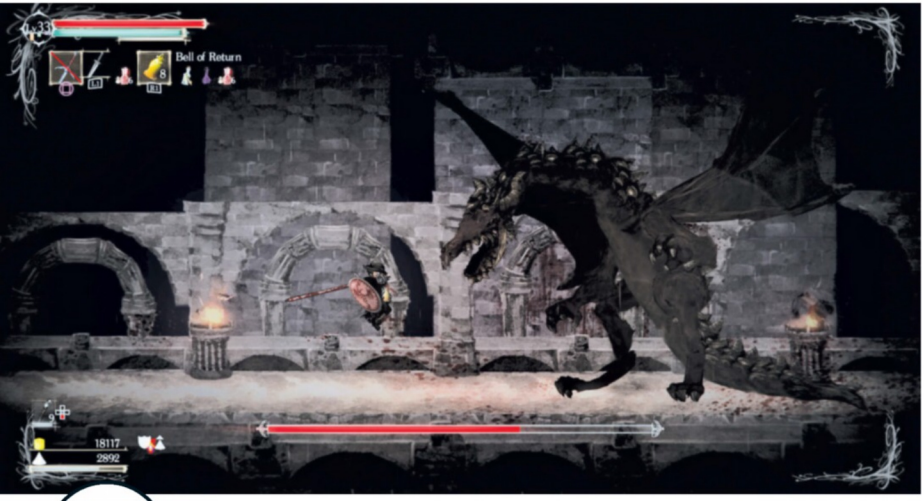


△○×□ **The skill tree is *massive* and is extremely rewarding to get your teeth into.**

IN THIS SERIES

AXIOM VERGE The two-dimensional explorative nature of *Salt And Sanctuary* harks back to *Metroid*, and *Axiom Verge* is a fantastic *Metroid* game in everything but name.









These fights channel *Castlevania* more than *Souls*, forcing you into a 'trial and error' approach rather than 'observe and exploit'. They can make for some tense climaxes when both you and your foe hit the end of your life bar and you need to get the last hit in. Some bosses, however, just *stuck* to us making our ranged (Hunter and Mage) builds pretty much useless and forcing us to pathetically wield an under-levelled sword like we were Harry Potter facing down a Balrog with a pack of Twiglets.

It can get frustrating, sure, the art style can make you forget that colours exist and it generally feels all a bit like that it's all cut from a template – a very good template, mind – but there's something that's so alluring about *Salt And Sanctuary*. It's the gameplay, it's the systems underpinning that gameplay, it's the exploration; yes, it may have copied almost every gameplay element wholesale from *Souls*, and maybe even *Castlevania*, but it does everything so well that you can forgive it. Heck, the game could murder your entire family and you'd still invite it round for dinner.

Drew Sleep

VERDICT

A robust and rewarding *Souls*-like. We'd rather it deviated from its source material a little more but there's no denying what's in front of you is worth the price of admission.

PlayMag_UK scored **8** for Salt And Sanctuary

8

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own Firelink Shrine in everything but name. Then there's the Skill Tree, which is pretty much ripped from any other RPG that uses a similar system – think *Path Of Exile* or even *Final Fantasy X*. With each level, you're essentially awarded a point to allocate in a slot – you can boost an attribute, unlock the ability to use different weapons or increase the amount of health or mana potions you can hold. It works well in the context of a *Souls*-like experience and it's by far the best innovation, out of the two, over FromSoftware's games.

In spite of all the homages, we do like *Salt And Sanctuary*. It plays extremely well, the combat feels meaty and responsive, the Skill Tree gives a rewarding sense of progression and its world feels suitably like a Metroidvania game – there are even platforming sections, and they're done well. We also like the boss fights... well, most of them.

SHARE

PLAY CHALLENGE



SHARE THESE FEATS, IF YOU CAN...

NAKED AMBITION

TRY DEFEATING THE game's first boss naked – you might actually find it easier than using armour...

DRAGON SLAYER

YOU HAVE TO finish a brawl with a dragon in a stylish way, right? So, grab your greatsword and jump at that sucker for the last hit.

Beaten our trials? Let us know @PlayMag_UK!



INTERVIEW

A JOURNEY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT HELL

Deus Ex, Thief and BioShock designer Jordan Thomas goes indie with The Magic Circle, coming soon to PS4

What is the plot of The *Magic Circle* and what role does the player take?

You play the hero of a unfinished game, one of these ultra-hyped sequels that has promised the world and delivered nothing. It's been stuck in development hell for 20 years, and is sort of Pixar-like, you get sick of waiting for your story to start, so you decide to seize the tools of game creation from the fictional development team and release the game from the inside.

You achieve that by trapping objects and creatures within a glitchy-looking area called the Circle, and then diving into the 'code' that tells them how to behave, and editing it. It's kind of like how you thought game design would be as a kid. Want to ride a flat rock around? Put the 'float' behaviour on it, and a cloud appears. Then give it a shove and surf it across a gap.

Every puzzle in the game is the result of (fictional) developer neglect, and there are many 'right' answers to each one. So instead of making us look smart, the puzzles are meant to make you feel creative, quick on your feet. Eventually, though, the fictional dev team becomes aware that their game woke up and tried to ship itself! Comedy and/or tragedy ensues. It has a meta satirical tone, and, like me, it both loves and hates the stereotypical player – hopefully in a memorable way

How did you end up bringing *The Magic Circle* to PS4?

Well, a real gentleman from Sony called Matt Kessler found us at PAX, and became a relentless internal advocate for the game. The current target is 10 May, although for obvious reasons we'd love to deliver early.

We've upgraded the engine to *Unity 5*, and included all the extra goodies we added to the PC version, the combined package of which we're calling the 'Gold' edition. Now that, I admit, is a joke some will miss. But hey, it sounds shiny – and the idea of bringing it to a huge new audience gives us genuine joy.

What was it like working on *BioShock*, and how do you feel about working on indie games as opposed to in a studio?

Looking back, I think of *BioShock* as sublimely conflicted, a snapshot of the soul of the games industry in its day. The median age of players began to climb and some of them started to crave uptown themes and improved quality of writing, and others stayed vocally downtown about it. 'No,' they'd say. 'Games are expressive but self-contained play, the meaning need go no deeper than the act itself.' The resulting hybrid was an attempt to be both, to appeal to both crowds. I'm very drawn to the push towards games as a high narrative art, say, but then I see the likes of *Rocket League* and lie awake wondering if I am catastrophically missing the point of what they do well.

Plus, the financial model hadn't really caught up yet. Everyone was chasing the all-singing, all-dancing *Call Of Duty* dollar. We've since seen that monolithic price point shatter a bit. I mourn

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the fact that the exact teams which made each *BioShock* will never make another but look at all the fascinating games the individuals have gone on to breathe life into. That's my lazy waterslide segue into the indie question. The creative agility of working with a team of four or less is ultra-liberating, but all the satellite concerns of running a business have given me a new-found respect for all the jobs that were just invisibly done for me. Because now – in addition to the creative stuff – I'm doing a mortifyingly awful version of the work other people were so good at. It's like failing with style.

How did your time in triple-A inform the world and story of *The Magic Circle*?
It's definitely a behind-the-scenes story, but we tried to open up the inside jokes widely enough that if you've played a game and have ever seen a glitch, or waited too long for some trumped-up sequel, you'll identify with it. One thing I will say is it's not about any of my specific bosses or colleagues. When I'm harshest in the story it's because the fictional creators are guilty of something we've caught ourselves doing, either as devs or as players.

The game isn't made by just yourself – it's created by a studio you've formed called Question LLC. Who comprises the team and who does what?
Kain Shin comes from the *Dishonored* team, and is our tech lead. The Lego-like system that lets you construct AI out of modular behaviors in *TMC* is all him. Stephen Alexander built 99 per cent of the art by hand – he was the FX and narrative scene engineer behind a lot of *BioShock*'s more visually arresting moments. He's also a capable programmer, though, and getting more so all the time. And I do game design, level design, and writing, with maybe an extra helping of business development. Everyone is QA, everyone promotes. The actual game grew out of a short, jokey pitch I made to Stephen about two devs arguing over an unfinished game on a whiteboard. It grew into what we have now: occupying the software-in-progress. But the spirit of that joke is still there.

Why do games end up like *The Magic Circle*, as in the in-game game?
Well, you have to turn off the editorial part of your brain to even get off the ground with a creative project; you're so exposed that to overthink it would stop you dead and your final product would be a jar full of tears. Later, though, you must fall out of love with your ideas and start to imagine what people will say. You can lose years to that loop, and that's if you have the luxury of control! Just as commonly, a internal conflict between developer or publisher, or owners versus employee will stop anyone from committing too much of their own energy for fear of wasting it, fear of having their work thrown out. And if people begin to think that way, in my experience, the cause is lost.



EXTENDED PLAY

DOOM

If the impending return of the legendary Doom means all you can think about is Cyberdemons, chainsaws and quad damage, here are a few things to keep you occupied



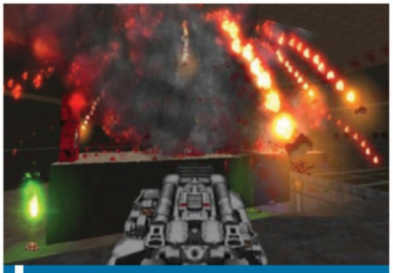
WOLFENSTEIN

■ **THERE'S BEEN A** strong link between *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* since day one, with the likes of John Romero and John Carmack working on both series while at ID Software and *Wolfenstein 3D* providing the basis for what the studio would go on to do with *Doom*. This reboot does not forget that legacy, offering a modern interpretation of that old-school style of FPS. In that regard, it stands out from the titles that have taken *COD* as their template. It earned an 8 from us in issue 245, so it's certainly a game that's worth playing. If you've already played *The New Order*, then you might want to give *The Old Blood* a try.



DOOM CLASSIC COMPLETE

■ **WHAT A TRIBUTE** it is to the game that revolutionised the industry that, after all these years, the midi metal music still gets the blood pumping, the blast of gaming's greatest shotgun still packs a punch like few others, and the distorted cry of those demon bastards still sends shivers down your spine. *Doom* holds up well for its age. Thankfully, it's still easy to revisit the original whether for nostalgia, curiosity, or the pure pleasure of blasting demons. *Doom Classic Complete* on PS3 includes the original *Doom* with the additional episode, Thy Flesh Consumed.



BRUTAL DOOM

■ **WHILE WE PREFER** to stick to our PlayStation consoles, *Doom*'s history on PC means we can't go without mentioning the array of mods that have been produced by its strong community over the years. Perhaps the most prolific is *Brutal Doom*, which adds mouse look, updated graphics, new animations, more blood, headshots, executions, new weapons, particle effects, and a whole lot more. If you're booting up your PC, you may as well also check out *Quake Live*, an updated version of *Quake III Arena*, given that it is so clearly an influence on the new *Doom*'s multiplayer.



DOOM 3 BFG EDITION

■ **RESPONSES TO THE** third *Doom* have been very mixed. That's in part due to the fact that the game pushed the horror aspects of *Doom* hard, pulling back on the fast-paced action focus of the original and toning down some of its more ostentatious aspects. Understandably, some *Doom* fans aren't really into that shift in focus, but there are some that argue that if you approach it as a survival horror then you'll see that it is actually a very good game. *BFG Edition* was released in 2012, boasting enhanced visuals and sounds, a checkpoint save system and the ability to use a flashlight while aiming a weapon – whether that mechanical tweak is a good things or not depends on if you're one of those people who thought the flashlight mechanic was tension building, or simply annoying.



THE DOOM UNIVERSE

■ **IF YOU WANT** to expand your experience of the *Doom* universe into other mediums, there are options. Bizarrely for a game that paid little attention to storytelling, there were four tie-in novels released for the original *Doom* and two more released in 2008 and 2009. We've got other things to read, so we think we might just give them a miss. Outside of the novels, there's also the awful 2005 *Doom* film staring The Rock and a tabletop *Doom* board game, also released in 2005.

TROPHY GUIDE

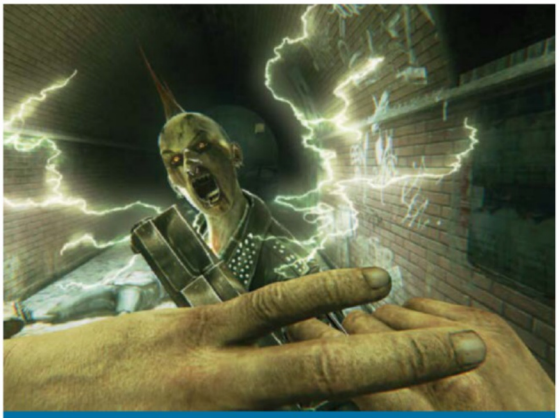
PS PLUS TROPHY GUIDE

DEAD STAR

PLATFORM: PS4 **DIFFICULTY:** 5/5
TROPHIES: 48 1 3 8 36

■ **AS EVER, YOU'LL** want to get to grips with the three tutorial stages and net the relevant Bronze rewards for clearing those. This is an entirely online game, so skill is going to be important when you're blasting your way through the 10v10 battles. Killing 100 enemies, getting 100 assists, achieving increasing increments of kill streaks and leveling up ships and pilots is going to get you the most rewards quickest. The higher rewards are team-based: 50 TDM wins, decisive victories and all that. Just focus on getting *good* and you might just work your way towards that Platinum – we'll just say that at the time of writing, nobody has it, so, uh, good luck!





ZOMBI

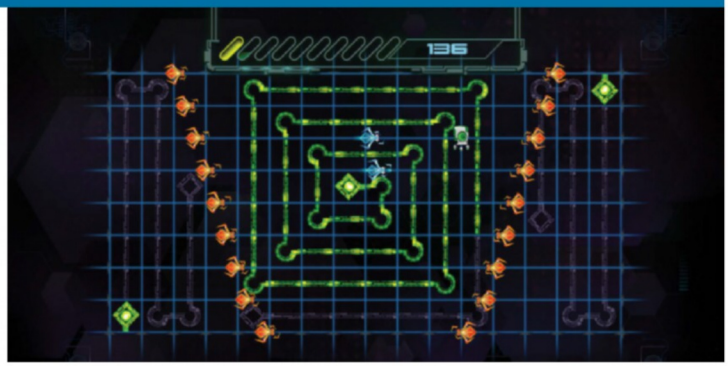
PLATFORM: PS4 **DIFFICULTY:** 1/5
TROPHIES: 21 1 8 8 4

■ **ANNOYINGLY, DIFFICULTY TROPHIES** don't stack for this game. The upshot of this is that you get to play through it on 'Chicken' first, learning the game and collecting everything that isn't bolted down. Find and hack all 16 CCTV junction boxes, locate the two backpack upgrades, and stay alive long enough to kill 200 zombies with one character and get a Survivor Score of 2000 while you're at it: this will unlock *everything* not story-related on your first playthrough, so you can focus on simply bombing through the game on the remaining two difficulty modes.

A VIRUS NAMED TOM

PLATFORM: VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 13 0 1 3 9

■ **GET USED TO** completing levels in this game without really doing much other than moving about a bit and turning the occasional tile: most of *A Virus Named Tom*'s Trophies reward you for puzzle solving without dropping glitches or stealing any energy. The later levels might require you to complete the stages without dying, and that can be pretty tricky, but a little planning ahead and getting to know the grids will sort you out there. The game's only Gold requires you to finish each level after getting all collectibles and maxing out your score, which isn't too hard to do if you run through the whole thing a second time with speed and consistency in mind.





SHUTSHIMI

PLATFORM: VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 12 0 1 3 8

■ **AN UNDERWATER, FISH-CENTRIC** shooter, this bizarre little game revolves around you shooting morphing bullets from a shotgun and wearing hats to get power-ups or debuffs for seemingly no reason. It's great. Jump into the game, learn the ropes and finish it normally by killing all six bosses: this'll get you three Trophies and unlock

"DON'T BOTHER WITH THE POST-GAME 'VICTORY LAP' STUFF – IT GETS HARD REALLY FAST"

the additional Boss Rush mode. Finish that, net the Gold and prepare for hell. You'll have to go back into the main game, but don't bother with the post-game 'Victory Lap' stuff – that gets hard really fast. Instead, start new playthroughs and just blindly hope RNG will smile upon you so you can get the power-ups you need for the specific Trophies.

I AM ALIVE

PLATFORM: PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 12 0 1 4 7

■ **WE RECOMMEND HITTING** this game in two halves: one regular playthrough, so you can grab all of the missable stuff, then a second on Survivor difficulty where you can just grind out the story until you hit the end. You *can* do both at once if you want to save time, but it can get quite frustrating pretty quickly if you opt for that route. Provided you hit the prompts for quick kills and rescue everyone you can, you'll nab all but one Silver Trophy on your first playthrough. Once you know the level setup and where all the important items are placed, you can probably get through the Survivor playthrough in half the time of the previous run, as long as the difficulty modifiers aren't too much of a hassle for you.





SAVAGE MOON

PLATFORM: PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 4/5
TROPHIES: 13 0 1 2 10

■ **THIS CARRIES ON** the trend of being a tower defence RTS with irritatingly hard Trophies. To perfect this game, you'll want to be grinding towards 100 per cent completion as quickly as possible. To that end, you can grind away in Training Mode and still get Trophies. Once you know how the system works, complete a few levels and unlock the Vengeance incarnation of that level – this is an endless mode that's good for harvesting kills or getting points. Just complete all the levels and do as many of the Vengeance missions as you feel like and eventually you'll get everything you need.

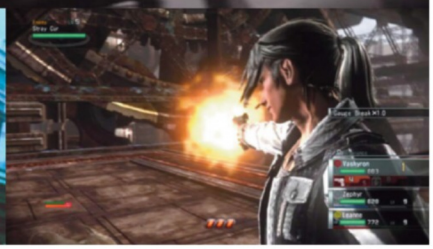
YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED...?

RESONANCE OF FATE

Combining RPG, strategy and fast-paced action gameplay with John Woo-style set-pieces and off-kilter story beats and characters sounds like a recipe for disaster, right? Wrong...







■ **LIKE THE PS2** before it, PS3 ended up being a real hotbed for great JRPGs. Many of these you probably played – the likes of *Ni No Kuni* and *Final Fantasy XIII* were so big that you'd have struggled to miss them – but the sheer amount of games available for the system meant that some would always fall by the wayside. Sega and tri-Ace's unique gun-based RPG would be one such casualty and that's a real shame since while all the major players were looking for ways to make the classic RPG format more universally appealing, *Resonance Of Fate* pulled it off perfectly and nobody noticed. Its combat system, while daunting at first, is deep and rewarding, with smart plays leading to satisfying acrobatic payoffs.

As much as combat tried to appeal to shooter fans, other aspects would make sure that JRPG devotees still got their fix of craziness. Vashyron – a videogame character and as such voiced by Nolan North – performing a weird dance-cum-monologue; a grid-based map that must be built to progress; Pater's giant head and 'LOVE ME' shirt; entire missions that turn out to be menial tasks; an in-depth costume customisation system. It's all bonkers, but it works and it all comes together to create a game that we'll never see anything quite like again – developer tri-Ace has since returned to a more traditional approach to RPG design with the *Star Ocean* series. Pity... we'd love to see a sequel one day.

THREE PILLARS

An RPG is usually only as strong as its weakest element, so here's how each aspect of Sega's forgotten masterpiece stacks up



COMBAT

Plan running bullet barrages, burn down health with temporary damage and execute awesome team attacks. Complex, but satisfying.



EXPLORATION

Collect hex grid parts to fill in the world map and make new places and events accessible. A truly unique approach to world design.



STORY/CHARACTERS

The core trio of heroes work well together and experience some crazy personalities and events along the way, even by JRPG standards.

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PLAY PLUS PlayList

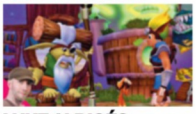
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LET'S PLAY... NAUGHTY DOG



LUKE ALBIGÉS
JAK & DAXTER

8 The glut of crappy cartoon platformers that followed in the wake of *Super Mario 64* quickly killed the genre. Who better to bring it back on PS2 than the House Of *Crash*? Too bad the sequels sucked...



LIAM WARR
CRASH TEAM RACING

7 Naughty Dog tried to infiltrate the kart racer market for PlayStation in 1999 to rival the N64's *Mario Kart* and *Diddy Kong Racing* but sadly, it just wasn't quite as good as the two Nintendo greats.



DREW SLEEP
UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

8 I borrowed this from a friend who has sadly moved on to the Great Arcade Beyond. It was such a pleasant surprise for me and whenever I replay it I think of my friend and smile. Thanks, buddy.



PAUL WALKER-EMIG
THE LAST OF US

9 It's the characters, story and voice acting that often gets the praise when it comes to *The Last Of Us*. All that stuff *is* great, but I'm also a big fan of the brutal and visceral way that the game plays.

PS4



GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Alien: Isolation	**249**	**9**
Amplitude	266	8
Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend	**268**	**5**
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China	257	7
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India	**266**	**7**
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	237	8
Assassin's Creed Syndicate	**264**	**4**
Assassin's Creed: Unity	251	6
Axiom Verge	**256**	**9**
Batman: Arkham Knight	258	9
Battlefield 4	**238**	**8**
Battlefield Hardline	256	7
Blazblue Chronophantasma Extend	**264**	**9**
Bloodborne	256	9
Bloodborne: The Old Hunters	**265**	**9**
Bound By Flame	245	6
Broforce	**268**	**6**
Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare	251	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops III	**264**	**8**
Call Of Duty: Ghosts	238	7
Child Of Light	**244**	**7**
CounterSpy	248	5
DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours	**266**	**8**
Daylight	245	2
Dead Nation: Apocalypse Edition	**242**	**7**
Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round	254	7
Destiny	**249**	**9**
Destiny: House Of Wolves	258	8
Destiny: The Dark Below	**252**	**7**
Destiny: The Taken King	262	9
Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition	**258**	**8**
Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls	248	9
Disney Infinity 2.0	**249**	**8**
Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition	264	8
Don't Starve	**240**	**8**
Dragon Age: Inquisition	251	8
Dragon Ball Xenoverse	**255**	**5**
Dragon Quest Heroes	263	8
Driveclub	**250**	**8**
Dying Light	254	9
Dynasty Warriors 8 XLCE	**243**	**8**
EA Sports UFC	246	7
Ether One	**258**	**8**
Everybody's Gone To The Rapture	261	8
Evolve	**254**	**6**
F1 2015	260	8
Fallout 4	**264**	**9**
Far Cry 4	251	8
Far Cry Primal	**268**	**8**
Fez	**243**	**10**
FIFA 15	**249**	**8**
FIFA 16	262	9
Final Fantasy Type-0	**255**	**8**
Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	243	9
Firewatch	**267**	**6**
Game Of Thrones: Iron From Ice	253	8
Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions	**252**	**9**
God Of War III Remastered	260	8
Grand Theft Auto V	**251**	**10**
Grim Fandango Remastered	**254**	**8**
Guilty Gear Xrd -SIGN-*	253	9
Guitar Hero Live	**264**	**8**
Hardware: Rivals	266	5
Hitman	**268**	**9**
Hohokum	248	8
Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number	**255**	**9**
inFamous: First Light	249	5
inFamous: Second Son	**242**	**8**
Just Cause 3	265	7
JStars Victory VS+	**260**	**6**
Killzone Shadow Fall	238	8
Killzone Shadow Fall: Intercept	**246**	**8**
King's Quest: A Knight To Remember	261	8
Knack	**238**	**6**
Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris	252	5
Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham	**252**	**6**
Lego Dimensions	263	7
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Lego Jurassic World	258	7
Lego The Hobbit	**244**	**6**
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Madden 16	262	8
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Mercenary Kings	244	8
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	**242**	**8**
Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	261	9
Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor	**250**	**8**
Mortal Kombat X	257	9
Murdered: Soul Suspect	**246**	**4**
N++	261	8
Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm 4	**267**	**8**
NBA 2K15	250	8
Need For Speed	**264**	**5**
Need For Speed Rivals	238	8
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Not A Hero	267	6
Nuclear Throne	**266**	**8**
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PES 2016	**262**	**9**
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Resident Evil Revelations 2	256	7
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Resogun Heroes	247	9
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Rocket League	260	8
Rogue Legacy	**248**	**9**
Rory McIlroy PGA Tour	260	5
Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo	**267**	**5**
Shovel Knight	258	9
Skylanders Superchargers	**263**	**7**
Skylanders Swap Force	238	7
Skylanders Trap Team	**250**	**7**
SOMA	262	8
Star Wars Battlefront	**265**	**6**
Street Fighter V	267	9
Strider	**242**	**6**
Super Time Force Ultra	262	9
Switch Galaxy Ultra	**253**	**8**
Tales From The Borderlands: Zer0 Sum	252	7
Tearaway Unfolded	**262**	**7**
Teslagrad	253	7
The Amazing Spider-Man 2	**245**	**2**
The Binding Of Isaac: Rebirth	251	9
The Crew	**252**	**5**
The Evil Within	250	8
The Last Of Us Remastered	**247**	**10**
The Order: 1886	**254**	**8**
The Vanishing Of Ethan Carter	260	8
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	**257**	**10**
The Witness	**267**	**10**
Thief	241	7
This War Of Mine: The Little Ones	**267**	**7**
Tiny Brains	240	6
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Transistor	245	9
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Ultra Street Fighter IV	258	8
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Until Dawn	**261**	**8**
Valiant Hearts	247	6
War Thunder	**239**	**8**
Wasteland 2: Director's Cut	264	8
Watch Dogs	**245**	**8**
Warriors Orochi 3 Ultimate	249	6
Wolfenstein: The New Order	**245**	**8**
Wolfenstein: The Old Blood	258	8
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WWE 2K16	264	5

PS3



GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
007 Legends	225	4
2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	**244**	**6**
3D Dot Game Heroes	192	8
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	**177**	**7**
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	211	7
The Adventures Of Tintin	**212**	**5**
Afro Samurai	177	6
After Burner Climax	**193**	**9**
Agarest: Generations Of War	187	7
Agarest: Generations Of War 2	**223**	**4**
Agarest: Generations Of War Zero	209	5
Age Of Booty	**172**	**8**
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	208	5
Alice: Madness Returns	**207**	**6**
Alien Breed: Impact	196	8
Alien Breed 2: Assault	**201**	**8**
Alien Breed 3: Descent	204	6
Aliens: Colonial Marines	**230**	**4**
Aliens Vs Predator	189	7
All Zombies Must Die!	**214**	**6**
Alone In The Dark	173	7
Alpha Protocol	**193**	**8**
Amy	215	1
Anarchy: Rush Hour	**194**	**7**
Ape Escape	208	5
Aquapazza: Aquaplus Dream Match	**239**	**7**
Aqua Panic	193	6
Arcana Heart 3	**207**	**7**
Armageddon Riders	207	6
Armored Core: For Answer	**173**	**6**
Armored Core 4	153	6
Armored Core V	**217**	**6**
Army Of Two	164	8
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	**188**	**6**
Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel	231	4
Assassin's Creed	**161**	**5**
Assassin's Creed II	186	9
Assassin's Creed III	**225**	**7**
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	199	9
Assassin's Creed: Revelations	**212**	**7**
Assassin's Creed: Rogue	251	7
Asura's Wrath	**216**	**7**
Atelier Ayesha: The Alchemist Of Dust	230	6
Atelier Rorona: The Alchemist Of Arland	**198**	**7**
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Batman: Arkham Origins	237	8
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Battlefield 1943	182	9
Battlefield: Bad Company	**168**	**8**
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	190	9
Battlefield 3	**212**	**8**
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Bayonetta*	**187**	**9**
The Beatles: Rock Band	184	9
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Beat Sketcher	201	8
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THIS MONTH'S NEW ENTRIES

The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

Tom Clancy's The Division	9
Hitman	9
Far Cry Primal	8
Plants vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2	8
Broforce	6
Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend	5
République	7

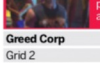
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GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Beyond: Two Souls	236	7
Binary Domain	216	7
Bionic Commando	179	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed	169	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	203	6
BioShock	172	9
BioShock 2	189	8
BioShock Infinite	230	9
BlackSite	163	4
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	160	5
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	190	8
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	198	9
Blazing Angels	151	5
Bleach: Soul Resurrección	209	6
Blitz: The League II	172	6
BloodRayne: Betrayal	211	6
Blur	193	8
Bodycount	210	5
Bomberman Ultra	185	8
Borderlands	185	8
Borderlands 2	223	9
Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel	250	6
The Bourne Conspiracy	168	7
Braid	188	9
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Rockstar's latest is a masterpiece: the perfect swansong for the generation and a wonderful addition to the franchise.

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*denotes import review

TOP TEN CLIMBING GAMES



1 **Shadow Of The Colossus**



2 **Tomb Raider Anniversary**



3 **Uncharted 2: Among Thieves**



4 **Mirror's Edge**



5 **Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time**



6 **I Am Bread**



7 **Trials Fusion**



8 **Assassin's Creed II**

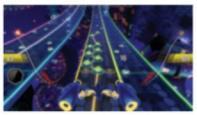


9 **Grow Home**



10 **God Of War III**

PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LOVE...



CLASSIC RHYTHM-ACTION
PLAY: AMPLITUDE
If you've been enjoying the rhythm-action genre's return in the form of new *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* games, why not go old school for some button-based musical fun in a brand-new *Amplitude*?



RESIDENT EVIL 4
PLAY: THE EVIL WITHIN
If you're a fan of the work of legendary developer Shinji Mikami (who has worked on many *Resident Evil* games, including the excellent *Resi 4*) then we recommend you try his return to horror with *The Evil Within*.



TABLETOP GAMING
PLAY: CATAN
No tabletop gamer worth their salt hasn't played *Catan* (or *The Settlers Of Catan*, if you are old). If you fancy playing while friends aren't around, this PS3 title will be perfect for you.



WEIRD GAMES
PLAY: THE LAST GUY
A top-down strategy title where you guide crowds of people to safety like you are herding sheep while avoiding monsters, the bizarre *The Last Guy* isn't like anything else out there.



STICKY BALLS
PLAY: TOUCH MY KATAMARI
If you like the idea of rolling a sticky ball about so that it grows ever bigger as it accumulates junk, then *Touch My Katamari* is the game for you. The nature of the game makes it perfect for PlayStation Vita, too.

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Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance is another world-class entry in gaming's most fundamentally playable genre.

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VITA

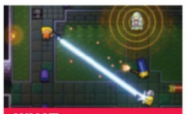


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*denotes import review

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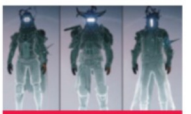
Watch out! Games!



WHAT (have they been playing?)
Enter The Gungeon
WHY (was it chosen?)
It's exactly my kind of game

LUKE ALBIGÉS

AS SOMEONE WHO really likes *Borderlands*, *Nuclear Throne* and *The Binding Of Isaac*, it should come as little surprise that a game that blends elements of all three with more pop culture references than you can shake a lightsaber at should have me hooked. The first floor is currently a little too important to a great run – you can occasionally get stitched up with no good gear and forced to face the boss with your starting pea shooter – but I'm sure that'll be addressed in time. And even if not, you soon forget all those nightmare runs when the perfect loot combos drop in the first few minutes and you get to steamroll through the rest of the colourful catacombs. With tons of cool guns and power-ups to find, I can see this being my go-to game for quite some time. Maybe one day, I'll even finish it? Yeah, as if...



WHAT (have they been playing?)
Destiny
WHY (was it chosen?)
Because Hunters have to hunt

DREW SLEEP

OH NO, IT'S happening again: I've relapsed. An alarm must have gone off at Bungie when I deleted *Destiny* from my PS4 and now a huge content update has landed in my lap. I told myself I was done, but did you *see* that new armour? I want that gear, forged from the bodies of hapless Taken, on my Hunter. Nothing strikes fear into the enemy like you rolling into battle wearing their cousin.

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